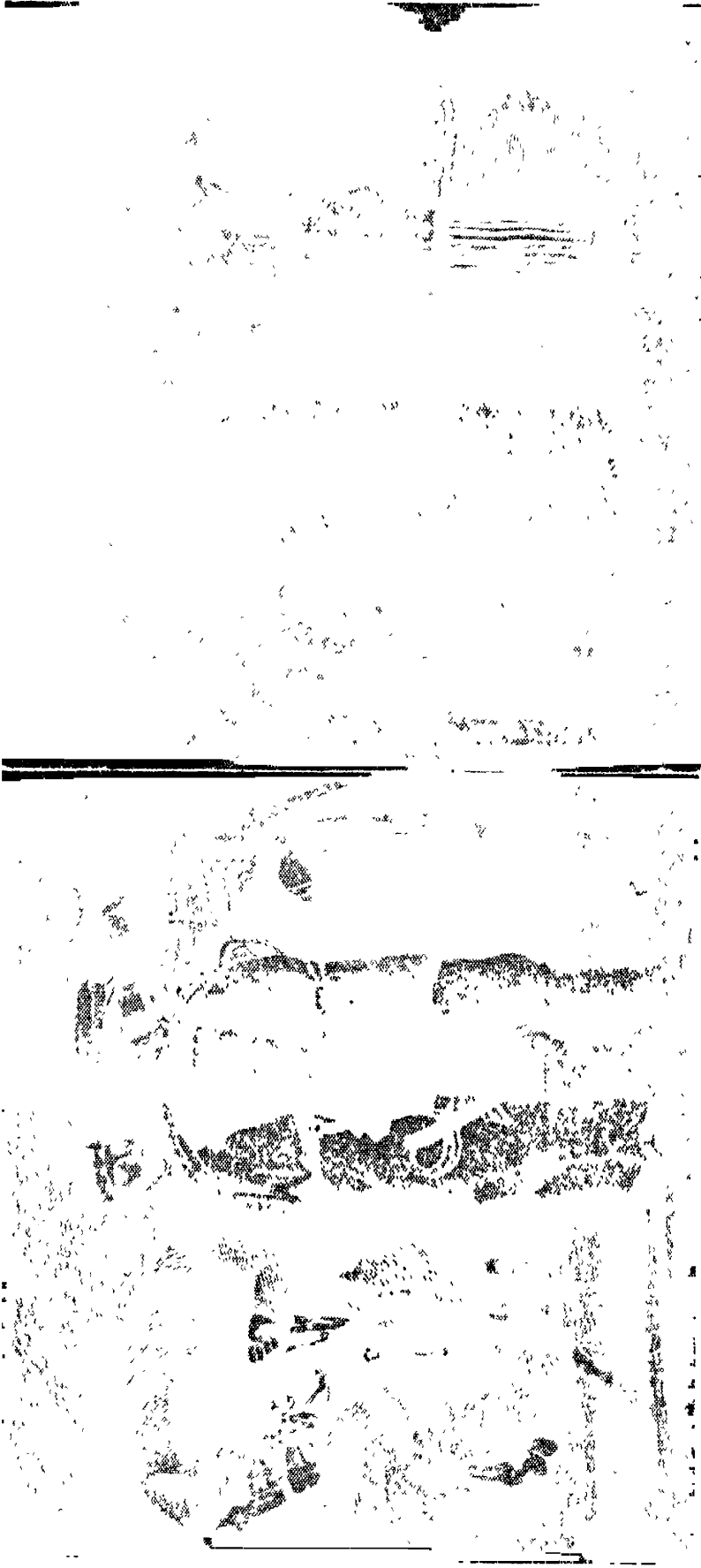
A NOVEL OF BAHADUR SHAH ZAFAR. A KING WHO WROTE POETRY AND SANG. A SUFI WHO LOVED GOOD FOOD AND BEAUTIFUL WOMEN. A PENSIONER-MONARCH ACTIVATED TO LEAD THE GREAT REVOLT OF 1857. A TEAR-AND-BLOOD SOAKED PAGE FROM INDIAN HISTORY.

G. D. Khosla

THE LAST MUGHAL

This is a most engrossing novel based on the life of the last Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar. For a brief moment of history this last Mughal became the symbol of resistance against the British and reigned from Delhi's Red Fort as the Badshah of India. This is a moving story of the poet-king who dreamt of restoring the Mughal imperial glory but lost everything—the regalia, the Peacock Throne, the Red Fort, the Kingdom itself....to die in exile after the War of Independence in 1857.

Bahadur Shah was no ordinary pleasure-loving scion of the decadent Mughal dynasty. He was a poet whose compositions are sung even today, a wonderful writer and marksman, a lover of good food and beautiful women, a simple-hearted retiring monarch subjected to the intrigues of Begum Zeenat Mahal.
He at once evokes pity and admiration.

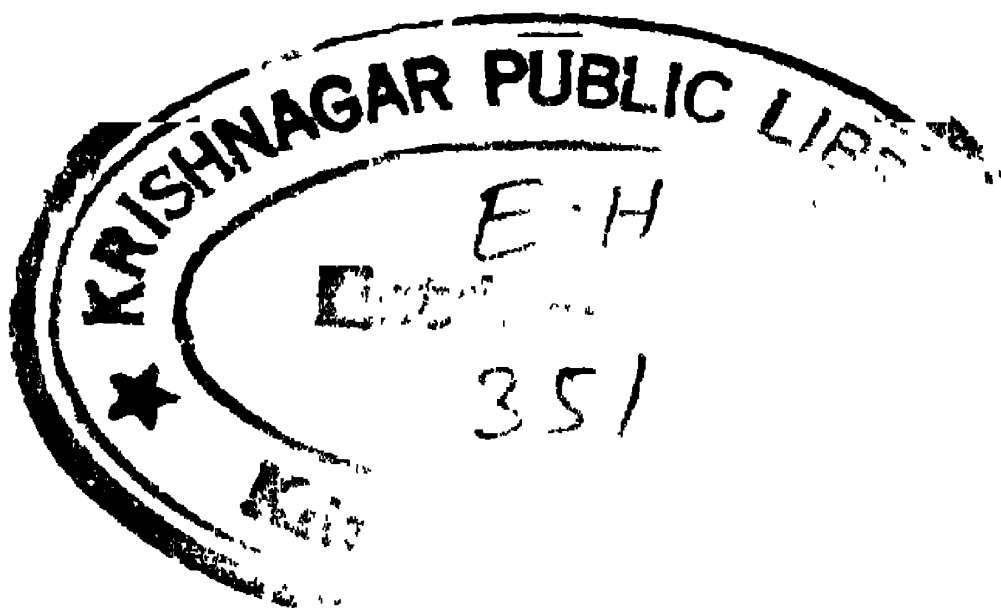
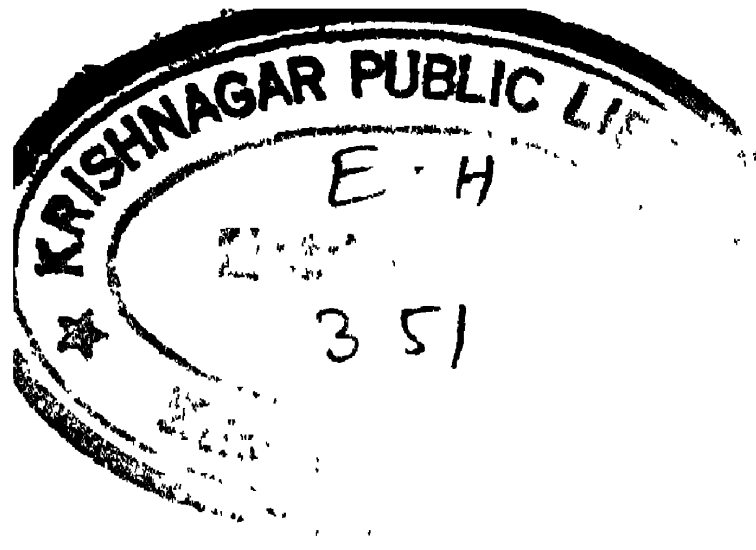
Justice G. D. Khosla became Chief Justice of the Panjab High Court in 1959 having entered Indian Civil Service in 1926. He was on the Bench that tried possibly the most famous murder case in Independent India—The Gandhi Murder Trial. He is our most popular writer of fiction, as well as serious subjects.

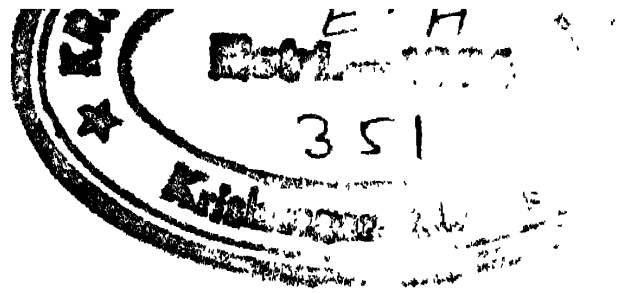
THE LAST MUGHAL

G. D. KHOSLA

ORIENT PAPERBACKS

HIND POCKET BOOKS (P.) LTD., DELHI-32

TO MY WIFE

BOOK ONE

PRINCE

No eye lights up on seeing me,
no heart feels solace in my presence,
I am that fistful of dust
which serves no use or purpose.

CHAPTER ONE

ABU ZAFAR acknowledged the acclamation of his attendants with a flourish of his gun, and gently pulled the reins of his mount. Domali, the Arab stallion, trained for hunting by Abu Zafar himself, dropped into a slow trot.

"*Marhaba, marhaba,* well done, well done," rang out the cries once again. Jumma, shikari, ran forward waving the trophy, a large black partridge shot down by the prince in full gallop.

It was a cool July morning in the year 1810. A heavy monsoon shower during the previous night had washed the countryside clean. The lantana bushes stood revealed in all their lush green opulence, their orange and white flowers staring unblinkingly like myriads of wondorous eyes. The mango-trees, wearing a deeper green foliage, were festooned with a multitude of yellow and jade-green fruits hanging from long stalks. The *jamans* had dropped most of their ripe fruit, and it lay spread out like a dark purple carpet round each tree-trunk. The coral-trees had shed their startling splendour of early spring, and the sunlit bunches of scarlet fingers had given place to the luxuriance of broad olive green leaves. The ground underfoot was soft and springy and dustless. Abu Zafar looked round at the familiar, comforting sight with a proprietory air. This was his own personal domain. In this forest, just across the Jamna, was his hunting ground. Here he came to shoot and to try the mettle of his horses, here he practised archery and gave lessons to his pupils. Here he tested his own skill and the worth of his fire-arms

and bows, and here he often rode and walked at a leisurely pace, composing a ghazal or working out new interpretations of Sa'adi's *Rose Garden*.

The hunting party arrived at the edge of a clearing where the ground was flat, and a broad irregular avenue of trees and bushes extended for nearly a mile to the river bank. Abu Zafar handed his gun to Jumma, and dismounted with a quick springy action. The heavy perfume of the wet forest hung in the air. Abu Zafar took a deep breath, filling his nostrils and lungs with the mixed odours of moist earth, dank leaves and lantana blossom. His large rounded eyes shone with quiet satisfaction, and there was a trace of a smile about his sensuous lips. "Great is Allah," he seemed to be saying, "and rich is His bounty."

The attendants stood round their master awaiting the word of command. The morning's bag was laid out—two black bucks and a dozen partridges. "A satisfactory performance," thought Abu Zafar, and he stroked his jet black beard, trimmed and groomed in the fashion of the Mughals. The long oval face with its dark complexion and well defined features was attractive if not quite handsome.

"Come, Kanwar Sahib," he called out in a friendly but authoritative tone, "Let us see what you learnt in Chittore."

A shy lad of eighteen or nineteen of vigorous build stepped forward and stood expectantly.

"Who taught you archery, Kanwar Sahib?"

"Sucha Singh Sikh," the boy replied, and began nervously and haltingly to describe the various tricks he had learnt from his *ustad,* to shoot backwards by aiming at the target while looking at its image in a mirror, to locate the target by sound, to judge the distance of an object and to shoot at a moving thing.

"He also taught me the art of using a sword, Your Highness."

"Excellent, excellent," said Abu Zafar. "The Sikhs are gallant fighters. Our *ustad,* too, was a Sikh from

the Punjab, the famous Apa Singh. He was a truly great marksman, and performed the most amazing feats with his bow and arrow. But come, let us not waste time. Your target is that point on the *jaman* tree where the lowest branch stems from the trunk."

Kanwar Hanwant Singh took his stance, stretched out his left arm, held the arrow in the fingers of his right hand with its nock resting on the string, and slowly drew it back as far as his chin. He ran his eyes up and down the *jaman* tree, seeking a point to fix his aim, and after a long moment, released the arrow. There was a sharp hiss and the arrow was lost in the thick foliage of the *jaman*.

"Try again, Kanwar Sahib, aim a little lower. Your target is only eighty yards away."

At the third try, Hanwant Singh's arrow found its mark. He was made to shoot at increasingly distant targets and given a discourse on the comparative merits of silk and cat-gut strings and the various types of bows and their laminations. The young lad listened in respectful silence, nodding comprehension and uttering approbatory monosyllables. Suddenly, as if tiring of the pedestrian business of giving instruction, Abu Zafar exclaimed:

"*Bas*, that is enough for today. You must practise what we have taught you. Remember, regular exercise and constant practice are most essential. Tomorrow you must exercise your fingers and arm muscles on the machine we have had installed in the Palace. And now," he turned to his attendants, "bring the Turkish bow which the Shah of Iran has sent us as his personal gift. We wish to see what it is capable of performing."

One of the attendants proferred an enormous C-shaped object. Abu Zafar grasped the two ends and strained to pull them apart. He ran his fingers over the laminated convexity, the horn piece on the outside and the sinew fibre covering the inner side of the strange weapon. He closed his hand over the ivory-

inlaid grip and nodded approvingly.

"*Mashallah,* Allah be praised," he said, his eyes dwelling lovingly over the bow. "What a beautiful object this is! What exquisite workmanship! How perfectly the laminations are glued together and how cunningly the grip has been fashioned. And what force, what power lies concealed here. Look, Kanwar Sahib, feel the strength of this bow. By the will of Allah, the bow could send an arrow to a distance of more than a thousand yards."

"A thousand yards!" repeated the attendants. "Your Royal Highness could shoot a running buck from a mile away. There is no one to compare with you in the science of archery. Even Apa Singh Sardar had to admit defeat in the face of your excellence."

Abu Zafar straightened himself to his full height. He must remember, he told himself, to reward the discerning attendant. Two rupees and a cotton scarf would be an appropriate recognition of the man's merit. For richer rewards his attendants must wait till—ah, till it pleased Allah to dispense justice. In the meantime...

"Take the target to the river side," he commanded, "and place it over there on the high bank to the left of the boat-bridge."

Two men lifted the target and its stand, and began carrying it along the broad avenue. Abu Zafar examined a large tray on which lay his bows and a miscellany of strings and chains. He selected a white silk string, ran it through his fingers and tested it with several quick and vigorous tugs. He then slipped the loop at one end of the string over the lower end of the C, engaged it in the nock and bent the upper end back by pushing in the convexity and holding the engaged end between his feet. The upper end was forced back till the free end of the string caught the top of the bow and slipped into the nock. With a deft movement of his fingers Abu Zafar fixed the string in the nock and braced the bow. He looked at the magni-

ficent weapon with obvious delight and smiled. He had had to exert all his strength to hold the bow and bend it back, but he had accomplished the task without faltering or fumbling and without making a mistake.

"*Wah, wah, Hazur,*" exclaimed the attendants. "What a bow, and with what perfection Your Royal Highness has braced it. Presence, an arrow from this bow will pierce the veil of the sky and bring down a piece torn from it. Truly, they make wonderful things in Iran."

Abu Zafar raised the bow and gauged the cast in the string by pulling at it with the thumb and forefinger of his right hand.

"*Wah wah,*" he said, "fully two maunds, eighty seers. Come Kanwar Sahib, come and feel the cast of this bow. Khalil, profer the jade ring which came with this bow."

Khalil, huntsman, extended his hand and presented the deep-green jade ring fashioned like a band with a shallow rounded groove on its outer side. Abu Zafar slipped the ring over his right thumb. Holding the bow at arm's length he hooked his right thumb around the bow-string, letting it rest in the groove of the jade ring. He crossed his forefinger over the thumb to lock his hold. He then slowly drew the string toward him, his left arm stretched out straight and motionless, the right elbow raised, the forearm in line with an imaginary arrow. Gradually and steadily the right hand drew nearer, straining against the increasing resistance of the bow, till he felt the brush of his beard on his hand, as the string pressed against his chin and lips. Slowly the hand went back and the string was once again straight. With a smile of satisfaction he said to the admiring attendants.

"We were not exaggerating. There is a pull of two full maunds in this bow, eighty seers, not a *chattak* less. What carrying power, what strength and what beauty in its craftsmanship! Look at it, feel it, draw it."

Abu Zafar stroked the bow and ran a caressing hand up and down its handsome curves. He touched the laminated back and the belly of the long and slender shaft, he wound his fingers round the grip and the ivory arrow plate in a loving grip, and plucked at the string as if he were drawing from it some kind of strange and exciting melody. His eyes dwelt fondlingly over the entire length of the bow. After a long moment, he turned his glance and saw that the target was ready, far away at the end of pathway. The sun shone directly upon its face and it stood out bright and prominent against the dull grey background of the high river bank. The air was absolutely still and a heavy warmth was beginning to envelop the forest. Despite the previous night's rain the cool morning was growing into a warm oppressive day.

Abu Zafar chose a light arrow and examined it closely. In a soft, almost inaudible, voice he repeated Sa'adi's Persian couplet.

It sometimes happens that an artless boy,
Unwittingly hits the target with his shaft.

He pressed the arrow under the bow and engaged its nock, pressing it against the bowstring. The attendants hushed themselves. Hanwant Singh's incredulous eyes opened wide at each successive movement of his *ustad.* Abu Zafar turned the bow over, quickly raised it and began drawing the arrow. As the shaft moved over the plate above his grip, he held his breath. A tenseness, a strange excitement seemed to take possession of him. Suddenly there came a piercing whine, and as it grew fainter, Hanwant Singh saw the arrow, a small dark spot far away and well above the target. It descended rapidly, and the next moment, the arrow had fallen upon the target and come to rest in its centre. Cries of praise and approval and salutations burst from the attendants. Everyone began shouting and salaaming with low bows.

"Marhaba, Hazur, Wah wah."

"What perfection."

"*Subhan Allah,* Gracious God, the prince has no peer in the entire world."

"It is the gift of God the merciful."

"*Hazur,* deign to accept my humble salutations."

"Your Honour's slave offers you his congratulations."

Abu Zafar muttered to himself "It sometimes happens that an artless boy," and though for a brief moment that, like Sa'adi's artless boy, he too, should destroy the Shah's present. He turned the bow over in his hand, examined it critically, and with a quick adroit movement, disengaged the string. The bow sprang back to its original shape of an enormous C. He handed it to Khalil, and gave the order to return to the Palace.

The attendants busied themselves with collecting the guns, bows and arrows, the day's bag and the multifarious paraphernalia of earthenware carafes containing cool water, baskets of mangoes and confectionery, carpets, sheets and cushions which always went with Abu Zafar's hunting excursions. A groom led Domali up, and Abu Zafar stood for a moment admiring the stallion, the gold and silk embroidered reins in his left hand, his right resting lightly on the pommel.

Suddenly the silence of the forest was splintered by the tumult of hoof-beats and shrill human voices. Abu Zafar turned round and saw his half-brother, Mirza Jehangir, riding at the head of his band of Pathan cavalrymen. There were five of them including the Prince. The party had obviously been out hunting, for the cavalrymen were carrying sporting pieces and one of them had the carcass of a young spotted deer lying across his saddle. Jehangir pulled his horse to a stop, and addressed his brother in a loud voice charged with exaggerated courtesy.

"My respects to Bhai Sahib, my honoured princely brother."

Abu Zafar inclined his head, and raised his right hand to acknowledge the salutation. "My blessings on you, Mirza Jehangir," he replied, "May you live long."

"Not much use my living long, if others are also alive. Isn't that truly spoken, Bhai Sahib?" Jehangir laughed tauntingly.

Abu Zafar shook his head. "He has been drinking again," he thought. Aloud he said: "Living and dying are ordained by the all-powerful Allah who accords the gift of life and sustains it for as long as it pleases Him."

"Ah, brother, you are for ever harping on your Sufi philosophy. I am not learned enough to discourse with you, but I do know one thing that Sheikh Sa'adi said: 'Be a dog, but don't be the younger brother.'"

Jehangir spoke angrily. His voice was full of passion, and there was a look of intense hatred in his eyes. Abu Zafar made no answer and strove to keep calm, though he wanted to teach the insolent pup a lesson he should never forget. For a long moment a heavy silence hung between the two brothers, the younger scowling down from his mount at the elder standing near his horse. In outward appearance he was calm and placid, as he gazed back with his large wide open eyes at the angry prince. Then Abu Zafar's rich soft voice pushed across the cloud of malevolence.

"Did you go hunting, Mirza?"

"Yes, Exalted One, but all we got was this young *cheetal.* His mother escaped, bounding away, terror-stricken and looking back at her little one lying dead. There will be delicious *kababs* for us this evening. And what was your bag, Mirza Sahib?"

Abu Zafar gave a brief account of his excursion, adding:

"And just now we were practising archery. Kanwar Hanwant Singh was taking a lesson. He is a most promising lad."

"Ah, of course, your skill in arms is famed through the country. You have no equal in the way you handle a bow or wield a sword. Allah be praised, the honour of the House of Timur is safe in your hands."

Abu Zafar winced under the sarcasm in Jehangir's

tone, but decided to acknowledge the loaded compliment with a deprecatory laugh and an exaggerated salaam. He said:

"Mirza, may the evil eye keep away, you are no mean performer yourself. I have heard much about your proficiency with the sword, and your horsemanship is famed through the land. Has it not been said that there are only two and a half real riders in the country, and you are one of them?"

"And you are the best of them all. My humble respects, Mirza, why do you make me feel ashamed of my shortcomings, and drag me into the thorny bushes of controversy? I thank you for your large-heartedness. If you would deign to honour me with a little instruction, I shall be a proud man."

"This is truly magnificient! Who am I to give instruction to a descendant of Timur?"

"You, Mirza, you, a prince of the royal blood, fathered by the Mughal Emperor, even though your honoured mother......". Jehangir laughed tauntingly and continued, "Well, let that pass. Forgive your little brother and give him a lesson in the use of the sword."

Abu Zafar ground his teeth. The gibe about his mother hurt, but he must keep control of himself. There is a time for everything, and neither the place nor the occasion was appropriate for chastising the Emperor's favourite son. God would provide him with the opportunity to pay all his debts, the frequent insults and two attempts on his life. He must wait for the sign. Perhaps Allah himself would dispense justice when the moment was ripe for reckoning. Men are no more than the instruments of Allah's will. He contrived an affable appearance and said:

"I am only too ready to serve you, Mirza. Dismount and unsheath your sword. Come, let us both learn from each other."

The two princes stood facing each other, Abu Zafar outwardly calm and self-possessed, Jehangir, pale, nervous and restless, making quick purposeless movements

with his hand, shifting his feet uneasily. The brothers were of about the same height, but Abu Zafar's athletic build, broad shoulders, dark complexion and a jet-black pointed beard gave him the appearance of towering over his sparsely constructed opponent. Abu Zafar's voice came sharp and dry as he said:

"Come, Mirza, take your stance."

The two men began by making slow, tentative movements, halting, feinting, exploring, parrying, each taking the measure of the other's competence and searching for an opening, a weak spot while they moved round in a small circle. Jehangir was not a novice in the art of swordsmanship; he had received instruction from more than one *ustad*. But either he had not diligently practised what he had learnt, or he was in a state of unusual excitement induced by the unexpected encounter with his elder brother, or perhaps his judgement was clouded by the after-effects of a riotous evening with his boon companions, it became clear within a few moments that he was no match for Abu Zafar whose science, skill and agility far surpassed his. Jehangir soon realised that his assaults and parries were clumsy and ineffective against the perfectly executed movements of his elder brother. Abu Zafar could have disarmed him and dealt a conclusive blow a dozen times in the course of as many minutes, but he chose to play a teasing game, driving Jehangir into a defenceless position and then retreating to let him recover and make a fresh attack. Jehangir's anger began to rise. With each inconclusive engagement his sense of inferiority and his frustration grew, his envy and hatred increased. "This bastard, this son of a non-Muslim concubine," he said to himself, fuming with rage, "this odious usurper of my rights, excels me in everything. He is a better shot, a better swordsman, a better horseman, a better scholar, a better poet and yes, Allah's curse upon him, a better man in the eyes of the British who want to invest him with the dignity and office of Heir Apparent, though the King would much rather

confer the honour upon me. He and not I, will soon be receiving the *Waliahad's* monthly stipend of seven thousand rupees, and I must keep on begging favours from my brother and seek surreptitious loans from the city's money-lenders. Why? Because they say I love wine and song and beautiful women and all that is good in life. But how long can I continue to snatch these brief joys. As soon as the old king dies, Abu Zafar will choke the source of my funds. How will I live then? Oh, the utter injustice of my situation."

A sudden frenzy seized him. For him it was no longer a game, a friendly trial of skill with his half-brother, but a matter of life and death, a matter of his survival and the annihilation of his deadly adversary. There was not enough room in the world for both of them. He put more speed and vigour in his strokes. Regardless of leaving his defences open, Jehangir began to attack his opponent with greater vehemence. There was an element of wild and unrestrained viciousness in his rapid thrusts and ferocious blows. Abu Zafar watched his opponent's increasing recklessness with anxious calm, while his practised limbs moved with a quiet and nimble ease, avoiding and parrying Jehangir's sallies. Suddenly Jehangir made a feint at the Abu Zafar's legs, then quickly raised his weapon above his head and brought it down with the full force of his arm, aiming the blade at his brother's head. "Ha," he shouted, exerting all his strength to smash Abu Zafar's skull and cleave his body in two, thus ending all his troubles once and for ever. But Abu Zafar was too quick for him. There was a loud clang, steel striking steel, and Jehangir saw the quick flash of a sword flying through the air. It was a long moment before he realised it was his own weapon, and that he had been disarmed and defeated. Panic-stricken and helpless, he saw his blade lying in the dust, out of his reach, behind Abu Zafar who stood confronting him with dilated nostrils and eyes flashing with anger and hate.

"*Achha,* well," he exclaimed, his angry voice rising

to a high pitch, "so this is the lesson you wished to learn. Justly did you quote Sheikh Sa'adi's wise words, 'Be a dog, don't be a younger brother'."

Jehangir stood staring at his elder brother with sullen hatred, while fear began to gnaw at his inside, making him tremble.

Abu Zafar watched the young prince shifting uneasily and looking helpless. He felt a sudden impulse to raise his sword and cut off the head of his hateful enemy. Twice before Jehangir had tried to get rid of him. On one occasion, barely twelve months back, Abu Zafar had received a tray of his favourite *karela* comfit but his slave girl, Waheeda, had whispered in his ear that there was enough finely powdered glass in each little lozenge to kill a man. A few months later when he was handed a glass of *sherbet* and the glass had accidentally fallen down and broken, a rumour had spread through the palace that a secret potent poison had been surreptitiously introduced into the *sherbet* by one of Jehangir's man. Now, Abu Zafar thought, he had the wretched boy at his mercy. Here was the opportunity provided by Allah to pick the offending hair from his pat of butter and throw it away. But something inside him said 'no'. It would be cowardly to lift his hand against a defenceless adversary.

"This," he told himself, "is not the way in which princes of royal blood conduct themselves. And who knows what repercussions such a deed may cause. What will the British Resident think, and will he still support me if I......"

Suddenly he gave vent to a loud laugh, his whole body shaking with unrestrained mirth, while he continued to look at the young man's frightened face.

"Be good enough", he said at last, "to pick up your sword, Mirza. It pains us to see your empty hands. Let us see what more we can teach you."

Abu Zafar moved to one side, and with exaggerated courtesy, gestured to Jehangir to come forward and take up his sword. Jehangir stared, hesitating, wonder-

ing what further humiliation or injury his brother was planning. Did he really mean what he had said, or would he strike him from behind when he (Jehangir) stepped forward to pick up his sword. He looked round at Abu Zafar's attendants standing and watching him. They seemed to be ready to pounce upon him and avenge the wrong done to their master. His Pathan cavalrymen, too, were watching the scene from a little farther off. They returned his anxious glance. He knew he could depend upon them to shed the last drop of their blood if the need arose. The thought flashed through his brain—now or never. Their ancestors had always believed in the saying—The Throne or the Gibbet. So it must be the throne or the gibbet for him too. He ran forward, past Abu Zafar, and snatching up his sword, turned round to face his brother. Brandishing his arm in a wild frenzy he shouted to his cavalrymen:

"Come, come, now is the time. Prove the worth of the salt you have eaten. The throne or the gibbet, the throne or the gibbet."

Saying this he rushed at Abu Zafar, while the four cavalrymen with drawn swords ran forward to make a concerted attack on Abu Zafar. Abu Zafar half turned and began stepping back, parrying, the while, the rain of blows aimed at him. He needed all his alertness, all his skill and agility to keep his assailants at sword's length from him. The cavalrymen were poor swordsmen, they waved and flourished their arms with clumsy uninstructed vehemence and obstructed each other. Seeing an opening, Abu Zafar brought his blade down with full force and severed the arm of one of the Pathans. Uttering a loud cry of pain the man fell down. One of his companions raised his weapon to strike Abu Zafar, who saw him just in time and stepped aside to avoid the blow. The assailant also moved in the same direction, but in doing so, stumbled over the injured man and fell. The sword slipped from his hand. Abu Zafar received a glancing blow on his shoulder. Jehan-

gir had moved back, and when he saw two of his men fall, he ran towards his horse. Abu Zafar's men now ran forward and began belabouring the Pathans with sticks and clubs.

The skirmish was soon over, the Pathans quickly retreated, taking the injured men with them, and while Abu Zafar stood contemplating the scene with quiet satisfaction, Jehangir and his cavalrymen cantered away.

Mirza Jehangir's chagrin burst out of him when he and his Pathan followers slowed down to cross the boat-bridge over the Jamna. He ground his teeth and shouted.

"You will pay for this, you son of a low caste *domni*, I swear by the Almighty God that I shall not rest till I have taught you a lesson you will never forget." Suddenly he turned round in his saddle and addressed the cavalrymen. "And you, what did you do? You call yourself Pathans. You eat my salt. You bask in the sunshine of my princely glory, you have the protection of the King, and you could not punish the bastard who is trying to usurp my rightful place. You are a pack of useless disloyal dogs. Out of my sight."

Jehangir was a handsome youth of nineteen. His fair complexion, his finely chiselled features, his boyish appearance lent him an air of distinction. He had always got what he wanted, and he considered nothing beyond his reach. But Abu Zafar was a painful thorn in his side. Neither the King's open preference nor Queen Mumtaz Mahal Begum's surreptitious generosity availed him in his determination to eliminate Abu Zafar's rivalry, and the British authorities made no secret of their preference for Abu Zafar. The morning's reverse had dissolved the euphoric mist of inebriation, and he was angry, angry with Abu Zafar, angry with his Pathan attendants, angry with himself and with the whole world. He wanted something to make him forget the cruelty, the injustice and the frustration of his

young life. A vision of his glorious gallop through Chandni Chowk rose up before his eyes. That was when the glass of poisoned *sherbet* had fallen from Abu Zafar's hand. Jehangir had dressed himself in a coat and trousers of the English style, donned a black fur cap, strapped a belt to his waist, and mounted on his stallion, galloped up and down the crowded street of Chandni Chowk, scattering men, women and children in all directions. Two small children had been trampled to death, but he had shown the people of Delhi what a superb horseman he was. Today, he would like to repeat the feat, dressed like a true descendant of Timur, in his tartar dress, fur-lined vest and robe and his tall conical fur trimmed hat. It was a long time since he had worn this dress. What did it matter if it was a sweaty hot day in July. The people should realise that he was no ordinary individual, but a prince of the royal blood, an offspring of the predatory Timur.

But, first he must slake the thirst that parched his tongue and throat, and made his inside feel so dry and empty. He thought of the chilled bottles of French wine and *sherbets* waiting for him on the roof of the *Naqarkhana*. There, Amina the singing-girl, would hand him his glass and sing to him as he reclined against a *gao-takia*. At once his mood changed and locking up his anger and resentment, he let his mind dwell on Amina's shapely body and the cunning trick she had of twining her legs around his thighs in novel and exciting patterns. He spurred his horse and beckoned to his men to follow him.

On the roof of the *Naqarkhana*, sixty feet above ground level, a small *shamiana*, awning, had been erected, and under its shade, carpets, sheets and pillows had been arranged. Amina and her band of musicians were seated on one side and a long table laden with an assortment of coloured bottles, carafes and glasses occupied a handy place near the prince's large *gao-takia*. A cool breeze from the riverside fluttered the loose flaps of the *shamiana*.

Jehangir flopped down on the carpet and hugged the big round cushion with one arm. To Amina standing before him he said, quoting the poet Insha's couplet:

"Bring me a carafe of wine that has been chilled in ice, O Saki,
Make haste, my love, and bring me that which will slake the thirst of my soul."

Jehangir emptied the glass in one quick draught, and felt a delicious comforting coolth permeating his body. A second and a third glassful imbibed at a more leisurely pace restored his sense of peace and well-being and his belief in himself. He leaned back upon the pillow, stretched out his legs and asked Amina to sing. Amina began singing in a slow mournful measure.

I crave not the beggar's tattered cloak, nor pray for the crown of a King
Grant me only such measure of reason that with Thy love I may ever be crazed.

Jehangir did not know that this was one of Abu Zafar's ghazals, till Amina came to the last couplet in which Zafar's name occurred.

Better by far, O Zafar, than the austere invocation of a saint
The moans and supplications that rise from a drunken sinner.

As soon as he heard the name Zafar, Jehangir stopped the music with an impatient gesture of his arm and shouted:

"That bastard, born of a low caste Hindu concubine, whom our worthy father has publicly disowned, he, he has the temerity, the impertinence to intrude into our festive gathering. Turn him out, cast him out before he fouls this *mahfil* of beauty and song. Amina, how dare you mention the odious versifier in our presence."

He took another sip of Burgandy and continued: "Throw him out, also his friend the *ferangee* goblin. Ismail, do you think we are afraid of that son of an

owl, Looloo. Does he think he can order us about and make us do this and do that? Does he not know that we are born of the seed of Timur and Babar? What are we afraid of? Hey, Akhmed, what are we afraid of?"

Akhmed, a tall burly Pathan with baggy trousers, an embroidered sheep skin vest and a tightly wrapped turban, raised his hand and declaimed:

"Allah has ordered that Mirza Jehangir, may he always prosper, shall fear nothing, *nothing* and nobody."

Everyone present expressed agreement with this self-evident truth and one of the *salateens* suggested that Seton Bahadur be forthwith summoned to witness the Mirza's complete freedom from fear.

"Yes, yes, send for that Looloo and present him before us," ordered Jehangir, gesturing for a fresh glass of Burgandy.

Several voices shouted.

"Call him, call him."

"Bring him to this assembly."

"Yes, he will remember the juice of Mirza's cane."

"*Wah, wah.* What are you saying? Cane? Mirza will blow him into shreds with his revolver."

"Make a sieve of him. What does he think of himself, the monkey-faced *ferangee*?"

"We have seen many such. We shall go and bring him this minute."

"Yes, yes, go and bring him immediately."

Jehangir asked in a confidential tone: "Do you know how old was Jalaluddin Akbar when he beheaded his enemy?"

"Your Highness knows everything. The story of the exploits of the House of Timur lies open before your Highness like the splendour of the sun".

"Listen," Jehangir commanded. "We shall tell you."

He pondered for a long moment, studying the crimson liquid sparkling in his glass.

"He was thirteen," he finally pronounced. "He

cut off Himu's perfidious head with his own hands. And we, Mirza Jehangir, the royal offspring of Akbar the Second, are nineteen years of age. How can fear come near us. We shall prove this to Looloo one of these days. We swear by Allah, we shall."

Once more, he began brooding over the morning's encounter and his mortifying experience. His half-brother and Archibald Seton, the British Resident, were both full of perfidy and double-dealing. They were conspiring to deprive him of his rights and his inheritance.

"How wicked some people can be," he spoke aloud. "First, they deceive the King and throw him off his guard by Abu Zafar falsely renouncing his claims, and then Abu Zafar writes a secret letter to Looloo, going back on his declaration. Both of them must be taught an unforgettable lesson."

A Pathan cavalryman came running up to Jehangir, in great excitement, and exclaimed, "Hazur, your commands have been obeyed. Looloo is here."

Jehangir looked up, his glass poised halfway to his lips, his eyes questioning, incredulous, a slight suspicion of irritation wrinkling his brow.

"Presence," continued the Pathan, in an urgent tone, "he is coming, he is walking straight on to your Highness' palm, and you have only to close your fist and crush him into mincemeat."

Impatient with this enigmatic nonsense, Jehangir threw the dregs of his glass at the Pathan's face and demanded: "What are you talking about, Khurshid?"

The Pathan winced, but ignored the insult. He answered:

"Looloo, *Hazur*, Looloo. He is there, down below, walking toward the *Naqarkhana*. This is a God-given opportunity. For the sake of Allah, do not let him escape your hands."

Jehangir leapt to his feet, and rushed to the parapet. Far below him and not more than fifty yards from the great archway of the *Naqarkhana*, he saw Archibald

Seton's plump, short-statured figure slowly approaching. He was accompanied by his *mukhtar* and two peons. He was talking to the *mukhtar*, and every few steps, stopped, looked around him and gesticulated, pointing at different buildings. He was dressed in a long loose cloak and a broad-rimmed hat. In his hand, he carried a black malacca cane which Jehangir had often seen as part of the Resident's equipage. He was obviously returning from an audience with the King, and was, no doubt, discussing palace matters and poking his nose into affairs that were no concern of his.

Jehangir saw one of the peons look up at the roof of the *Naqarkhana*, and say something to his master. Seton, now, looked up and transferring the cane to his left hand, made a low salaam. Jehangir returned the greeting with a quick, brief nod of his head. He saw no reason why he should be over-courteous to his hypocritical enemy. "Snake masquerading as a friend," he said under his breath. He wondered if Seton had gone to the King to tell him that Abu Zafar must finally and irrevocably be named Heir Apparent. He felt a rage swelling up inside him, and stepping back from the parapet, he snatched up a musket lying near the pillow on which he had been reclining. Khurshid hurried to him. "*Hazur*," he pleaded, "the gun is not loaded, take my revolver". He proferred a bulky firearm.

"No, you fool." Jehangir shouted, "a revolver is useless at such distance, load my musket and be quick about it."

Khurshid reached for the bag containing powder and shot and fumbled awkwardly while Jehangir looked on impatiently for an interminable moment. At last the powder was rammed in, the ball of shot pushed inside the barrel and the weapon ready for use. Jehangir quickly snatched the gun and went back to the parapet, crouching low to keep himself out of sight. Seton had approached nearer, and was now standing talking to the *mukhtar* almost below Jehangir.

"Hurry, Presence," urged Khurshid, in a loud whis-

per. "In another minute Looloo will enter the archway."

Jehangir placed the barrel of the musket on the edge of the parapet and took aim. He muttered to himself: "*Abey*, Looloo, you will remember, won't you, with whom you had to deal?"

As he was concentrating on the sights, he saw one of the peons look up. He pressed his finger on the trigger, and at the same time, saw the peon pull at Seton's sleeve. As Seton moved, the loud report of the gun and the swish of shot were heard. Seton's hat was knocked off his head. Raising a threatening fist at Jehangir, he ran bare-headed into the archway and beyond where his carriage was waiting. Within a few minutes he was driving at a gallop to the British Lines beyond Kashmir Gate.

The news of Jehangir's reckless assault rapidly spread through the Red Fort, and began to be talked about and discussed with anxious concern among the *salateens* and the royal attendants. Everyone feared that the consequences would be disastrous, especially for Mirza Jehangir. The King summoned his son to his presence and severely reprimanded him:

"Is this the way a prince should behave," he shouted at him in a squeaky voice, "Do you realise what you have done? The Resident Bahadur is a very powerful officer. He will bring British troops and make prisoners of all of us. The Mughal Empire will come to an end and you will have to go begging for a piece of bread. How often have we advised you, admonished you, even upbraided you, but you and your drunken companions have never listened to reason. You have made our life a burden we are unable to carry."

Jehangir stood before his father, in sulky silence, his head bowed and arms hanging in front of him, his hands clasped in an attitude of submission. The King continued to harangue, and when at last, he had exhausted his stock of parental invective he told him to go.

"Get out of my sight, and don't let me see you again or hear about your misdeeds."

Jehangir backed out of the royal presence, and took counsel with his band of Pathan cavalrymen. He had the Fort gates closed, and he posted armed men on the ramparts. With a few hand-picked men he stationed himself behind the Lahore Gate of the Fort, and began to wait for Seton's next move.

He did not have to wait long. In the early afternoon a contingent of British troops was seen approaching. Jehangir's men on the ramparts reported that they would not be able to resist the British who outnumbered them and were supported by heavy artillery. A few minutes later, Jehangir heard reports of musket fire and saw three of his men fall from the ramparts. He ran through the arcade of the *Naqarkhana* and took refuge in a building behind the *Lal Purdah,* the red curtain which marked the end of the outer and the public portion of the palace. Seton's men pursued him and found him without difficulty, and firing a few shots in the air, called upon him to surrender. A beaten and frightened Mirza Jehangir slowly emerged from his place of hiding and allowed himself to be taken in custody and conducted to the British Lines.

Neither Seton nor any of his men laid hands on the prince. They treated him with the utmost courtesy and provided him with whatever amenities were available. In the evening Seton paid him a visit in his room, and spoke to him with genuine kindness. He enquired about his health and comfort with the exaggerated politeness of an oriental who knows how to soften the stark impact of the direct and the purely relevant word. Before taking his leave he said:

"Let me assure Your Highness that I shall endeavour to procure for you in your temporary solitude the means of innocent enjoyment. I have given directions for the purchase of a backgammon board, a table, two glasses and saucers. I am confident that my government will have no objection to conduct Your

Highness to more spacious and more congenial living quarters in Allahabad. We earnestly hope that there you will be comfortable and happy."

Abu Zafar rode home at a walking pace, his mind disturbed by the unpleasant encounter with Jehangir and his band of ruffians. God had been gracious and had saved him once again. The glancing blow on his shoulder had done no more harm than cut his tunic, but this was Jehangir's third attempt on his life, and he would have to speak to the King and plead for his protection. However much he might favour Jehangir's claim to be recognised as Heir Apparent, his father would scarcely encourage or connive at the murder of his eldest son, with the British authorities keeping a constant watch over all that concerned the royal family. Having once resolved to seek immediate audience of the King, he let his mind turn to more alluring matters. The newly acquired slave girl, Waheeda, would be waiting in his private chamber, shy, coy and daring in turn. Then, there was the partridge fight between his favourite cockerel and a bird especially brought from Agra with a formidable record of victories over the most redoubtable fighters. He must also find time to inscribe his latest ghazal in his handwritten collection. He would have to get a new pen to do full justice to his calligraphic art. He wondered if the new variety of *qalmi* mangoes had arrived from Mehrauli. The old gardener, there, was inclined to be forgetful and needed to be constantly reminded. A breath of cool air came sweeping over the Jamna and played about his face. At a sign from him, Domali broke into a trot, and entered the Salimgarh Gate of the Red Fort.

The news of Jehangir's escapade had already reached the Palace, and Waheeda was all concern and solicitation. She fussed over her master, skipping around him and speaking in her thin piping voice

which never failed to surprise and delight him. That such a rich and luscious body, so full of warmth and exciting mysteries should be blessed with the voice of a child unripe for a lover's embrace, was an instance of God's cunning craftsmanship.

"*Hazur*," she exclaimed, "May your humble slave be your ransom. May I die before a single hair of your body is harmed. Allah knows what came over that wretched prince. What a wicked, dastardly thing to do. God be praised, Your Highness is safe. You received no injury, did you? Tell me, my Prince, you have no pain, have you? Set my mind at rest. May he come to an evil end. The wicked Mirza, may the snake smell him and finish him in his sleep."

"Hush, Waheeda." Abu Zafar said in mock reprimand, while he wrapped his arm round her and let his fingers stray playfully over her soft rounded breast.

Waheeda smiled and nestled closer. "*Hazur*", she piped, "Begum Sahiba had a headache, and wished to be excused from being present at breakfast".

"Let it be, Waheeda. Forget the Begum. Today you shall be our Begum and our companion. Come, sing the ghazal we composed yesterday and make us forget Jehangir and his doings."

Waheeda sang in a recitative tone.

Rejoice my sorrowing heart, for behold, the beloved comes
The dust beneath his feet I'll be, when riding his mount he comes.

In the hunting field of love, I have chosen to be the prey,
For some time or the other, in search of game the hunter comes.

Beware my heart, and do not drink the draught from the goblet of love
For bitter as gall is the after-taste when sobriety finally comes.

Come to me, come beloved, I am ready to breathe my last
Of what avail a thousand visits once the angel of Death for me comes.

In reciting the last couplet Waheeda had disengaged herself from Abu Zafar's embrace, and stood before him with arms extended, her face and eyes charged with all the passion and seduction which her practised skill was capable of inducing. Abu Zafar felt a deep over-powering hunger stirring inside him and constricting the nerves and fibres of his belly, he drew the girl into his arms and began caressing her back and shoulders. Waheeda, passive and supple, in his embrace placed her cheek against Abu Zafar's and whispered the concluding couplet in his ear:

He came but once, and O Zafar, he took my heart away,
Oh, what will be my plight, when he comes and comes and comes.

Abu Zafar moved his hand down to the exciting swell of the girl's haunches, and folded her close to his body. Through his thin muslin tunic, he felt the urge of her breasts pressing against him firm, provocative, inviting. He whispered back: "Beloved, we shall come and come and come and we shall give you our own heart in exchange for the one you have lost."

"*Hazur*," Waheeda pleaded, "I am dying of happiness."

"Come then, my love, let us revive you with the cup of love."

Later, when Abu Zafar heard the story of Jehangir's latest prank and his removal from the fort, he was secretly pleased, though he made a great show of the distress he felt and spoke of the evil consequences that must result from the drastic action taken by the British authorities in making prisoner a prince of the royal blood and removing him from the Red Fort without the King's permission. This intrusion into the exclusive domain of the Emperor was a vicious precedent, and

might furnish an excuse for further interference and greater control of the Palace affairs. Abu Zafar saw in the incident an occasion to ingratiate himself with the King and win his support, now that Jehangir's chances of gaining British recognition were remoter than ever before. He decided to call upon him the next morning, and composed a courtly petition in flowery and honorific Persian containing a request for an audience. Having despatched the *ruka* he went to watch the partridge fight and saw his cockerel defeat and utterly rout the warrior bird from Agra.

The next morning, Abu Zafar donned the special cloak and head-dress which he wore on State occasions, and made his way to the *Diwan-i-Khas,* the Hall of Special Audience. King Akbar the Second was sitting in state with a small group of courtiers and fan-bearers. He was wearing durbar robes, and Abu Zafar at once realised that this was to be a formal audience granted by the King to one of his subjects and not an intimate dialogue between father and son. Behind the throne hung a curtain. Behind the curtain, Abu Zafar knew, were seated Akbar's favourite Queen and Jehangir's mother, Mumtaz Mahal Begum, his mother, Qudsia Begum, and his paternal aunt, Daulat-un-Nissa Begum, the three women who held Akbar completely under their influence and ruled the Palace. Everyone knew that despite the fortytwo-year-old King's vigorous appearance, his weak and pliant mind was shaped and moulded by the caprices of these three ladies. They were all of one mind in their deep dislike of Abu Zafar, and they all doted upon Jehangir, the young and handsome rake.

Abu Zafar walked upto the King's chair with slow respectful steps and made a low bow.

"*Abbajan,* I offer you my humblest salutation."

Akbar rose from his chair, and gave his son a perfunctory hug. "May you live long, Abu Zafar," he said in a casual airy tone. Abu Zafar stood silent for a long moment searching for words to convey his

grievance without seeming abrupt and unsympathetic. Finally he said:

"Refuge of the world, what can I say?

Observe how the body gets restless from head to toe.

When but a tiny splinter lies embedded in the finger-tip."

"Well said, Mirza," exclaimed the King, "No doubt, the couplet is of your own composition".

"I live in the protective shadow of Your Majesty."

"We know why you have come. We have heard what transpired yesterday between you and Mirza Jehangir, and you, no doubt, know of the cowardly assault upon our son and his forcible removal from our Palace. You cannot absolve yourself from blame."

Abu Zafar bowed his head in respectful silence. From behind the curtain came the voice of the King's mother.

"Mirza Abu Zafar knows that he did wrong in conducting himself with unfilial ingratitude, when he resiled from the solemn document he had willingly signed. Otherwise, things would not have come to such a pass."

Abu Zafar raised his head, and looking at the King, said in a voice calm but loud enough to penetrate the curtain.

"My revered grandmother is well aware of the circumstances in which I was obliged to put my signatures to a statement, surrendering my rights to the throne of Delhi, and accepting Your Majesty's choice of the *Waliahad*. Your Majesty also knows what pressures were brought to bear upon me. I did not sign the bond with a free will. Seton Bahadur was very perturbed by this happening, and came to question me closely on the whole affair. It was beyond me to dissemble or utter falsehoods. I told him...."

"Yes yes," Mumtaz Mahal Begum interrupted, "we know what you said to the Resident Bahadur. We also know that you did not hesitate to accuse His

Majesty of being a liar, and the Resident Bahadur had the impertinence to suggest an inquiry. Since when has anyone acquired the right to question the Shadow of God?"

Abu Zafar felt his patience draining out of him. Mumtaz Mahal was referring not to the involuntary renunciation of his rights and its subsequent retraction, but to a far more sordid episode which had caused him so much pain that every time he was reminded of it, his whole being rose up in revolt against the King and the vicious women who shaped his thinking. The King had, in a desperate attempt to convince the British authorities of Abu Zafar's unworthiness, accused him of incest. In a letter to the Resident, he had alleged that some years previously, before Akbar ascended the throne, Abu Zafar had committed adultery with one of his step-mothers, a young girl whom Akbar had introduced into his harem. When Abu Zafar heard of the charge, he had wept with chagrin. He told the Resident that this villainous calumny had been invented by the three ladies who were for ever designing against him. The Resident had recommended that an inquiry be instituted into the truth or otherwise of the accusation, but the King had vehemently opposed it, and had categorically declined to submit himself to such an indignity. Mumtaz Mahal's reference to the inquiry angered him beyond measure, but he strove to keep a calm exterior.

The King's aunt, Qudsia Begum now spoke. Her voice had a harsh rasp in it which made it sound like a piece of cloth being torn. "You did not take long to withdraw your solemn statement."

Abu Zafar's voice rose to the high-pitched note it always reached under the pressure of emotional strain. "Your Majesty knows that I never truly renounced my rights. As Your Majesty's eldest son I am entitled to be recognised as *Waliahad*. But this is not the object of my coming to Your Majesty, this morning. I really came to say how distressed I am by the cruel treatment

to which my brother has been subjected."

"Indeed," said the King with unconcealed derision, "it is generous of you to give thought to your brother. But you spoke of your rights. What rights has a dreamer and a versifier? You think that with your ghazals, your Sufi pretentions, your shabby clothes and with your fine calligraphy, you can rule a country. And what is this exotic notion about the rights of an eldest son? Under Islamic law all sons have equal rights. The Timurian custom does not follow the British law. If you did not waste your time in dreaming and versifying you would know that the law of the House of Timur sanctions the appointment, as heir, of whosoever, in the opinion of the reigning monarch, is the most worthy son. Is that so or not? Speak, Abu Zafar."

Abu Zafar made no reply. The King was right. Each time the Mughal succession had opened, the sons of the deceased King had had to fight for the throne, nay they had even declared war upon their own father, the King himself, before their rights matured. Akbar resumed, in a calmer and more deliberate tone.

"Yes, the choice falls upon the most worthy son, not the eldest born. For the rest, rights are determined by the sword. This has always been the way of Kings and soldiers. This is how our ancestor Humayun proved the justness of his claim to rule India. He did not hesitate to imprison his brother, have him blinded and sent to Mecca to pray for the absolution of his sins. The Emperor Jehangir's choice of his successor did not fall upon the eldest son, and the refractory Khusro, with inflated notions of his rights, had to be taught a lesson in humility and obedience. Jehangir defeated him in battle, and had him brought to court with his hands pinioned and his feet in chains. You have no special rights as our eldest son. We do not consider you worthy of being our successor. Why, if a stranger saw you in your everyday clothes, he would not take you for a royal prince, he would think you are one of Mirza Jehangir's staff-bearers."

Abu Zafar made a respectful bow. "Your Majesty knows," he said, "we are no longer free agents, and nothing can be done without the sanction and approval of the British authorities. I tender my apologies for any impertinence of which I may be guilty, and crave Your Majesty's permission to leave."

As he backed out from the royal presence, Abu Zafar cast a glance at the tawdry splendour of the effete court and the hollow dignity of the King whose speech and actions were prompted by three women seated behind a curtain. Walking slowly back to his apartments, he remembered how only a year back, Akbar, on the persistent nagging of Mumtaz Mahal had announced a date for the formal installation of Jehangir as Heir Apparent, and had communicated his decision to the Governor-General in a haughty *kharita,* addressing him as "Our Favoured Son and Servant," as was the custom when the Mughal Emperor wielded real power and dealt with the British traders as subjects and suppliants. The Governor-General had taken umbrage at this pretentious revival of archaic phraseology, and had categorically declined to recognise Jehangir's appointment. The Resident has been instructed not to attend the ceremony of installation. The rebuff had had the desired effect, and the proposed ceremony had been cancelled.

Remembering the incident, Abu Zafar tried to cheer himself. "Ah well," he told himself, "it will be as Allah wishes."

But he could not put out of his mind the bright prospect of the affluence that would be his, if, as Heir Apparent, he received a monthly stipend of Rs. 7,000. He would be able to publish his volume of verses, and his treatise on *Gulistan,* Sa'adi's *Rose Garden,* which was complete and only needed a careful revision. When he became King, he would strive to make himself truly worthy of the House of Timur. He would bring back to his court, the music, philosophy, art and literature with which Jalaluddin Akbar had embellished his court.

He would hold darbars and *jashans,* he would improve the conditions in which the *salateens* lived, and he would build mosques, gardens and pleasure houses and oh, Allah willing, there were so many things he would do, so many matters....

He was back at the door of his apartment. His shabbily dressed *darban* exuding a strong odour of sweat, broke into his day-dream. Inside, near the door of his bed-chamber waited Waheeda, coy, respectful and inviting. She had all the answers that his questioning heart was seeking.

CHAPTER TWO

RUMOURS WERE circulating in the Palace that the King was pressing for the recall of Mirza Jehangir from Allahabad, and had succeeded in persuading the British authorities to rescind the order banishing the unruly prince. A slave girl belonging to the King's zenana who had fallen in love with Abu Zafar, often brought him news of what was happening in Akbar's apartments, and reported snatches of conversation between him and the three powerful ladies. One evening she said to him, "*Hazur*, His Majesty was saying this morning that the big Lord Sahib in Calcutta is considering the King's request for Mirza Jehangir's return. The Queen felt very happy and said: 'Praised be Allah. I shall have my beloved son with me again and see him appointed *Waliahad*. I shall make an offering of a four-poster bed and a canopy made of flowers at the sacred shrine of Khwaja Kutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki.' The King said, 'amen, a hundred amens.'"

Two days later, one of Abu Zafar's chobdars came and told him that the King was in a black mood, and had loudly upbraided his servants, and rebuked them for being disloyal. "Even the slave girls of our royal harem," he had shouted in great passion, "carry information to the ghazal-reading reprobate." He had also abused the Resident Bahadur when the latter had gone back after an audience, and called him a perfidious, promise-breaking *faringee* who had compelled him to write out a personal order directing the young Prince to leave Delhi and live in the garden of Amir Khusro at Allahabad.

Abu Zafar had heard the story of Jehangir's deportation to Allahabad. He knew that Jehangir was being treated kindly and generously. He had been told by Seton that the British Government did not propose to recall Jehangir and he, Abu Zafar, need entertain no fears regarding his personal safety from that quarter. But the postponement of his installation in the office of the Heir Apparent and the recurring rumours about Jehangir's future disturbed him and gave him many anxious moments.

So, summer and autumn passed, and December came bringing showers of cold rain and chilling winds. It was the year when an arctic spell held Delhi in its icy grip for a whole week. Each morning as the city-dwellers, clad in their quilted doublets and woollen wrappings, came out to seek the pale warmth of the sun, they exchanged greetings and said: "Brother, they are cutting ice." Before sundown, they sat down on their charpoys, hugging their quilts and blankets, and from time to time extended their palms towards the red and blue tongues of flame dancing in braziers piled high with live charcoal. On the waters of the shrunken Jamna, a dark misty breath hovered. During the night, the lawns and paddocks of the Palace were sprayed over with a fine gravel of frost which crunched underfoot.

Abu Zafar was sitting in his chamber, and composing a ghazal. He had written down the *matla,* the opening couplet, but he was not pleased with it. He kept on searching for words to convey his thought with greater accuracy and elegance, but with every change, the lines became more clumsy and more prosy. He repeated the couplet aloud to weigh the true measure of its music and rhythm!

I am the lover, I decline not to partake of grief,
for grief is my bread,
You are the beloved, and grief is none of your
business, grief is your enemy's dread.

"No, no, Zafar," he exclaimed with impatience,

this is not poetry, it is not even passable rhyming." He tore up the piece of paper on which he had written a dozen versions of the couplet, and began repeating one of his old verses. A chobdar entered, and stood listening to his master.

"*Wah, wah, Hazur*," he exclaimed, "What a beautiful couplet, what delicate sentiment, and what high-flying fancy. Truly, Your Highness has eclipsed Mir and Momin."

Abu Zafar looked at the chobdar for a long moment. His mind was on the ghazal he could not compose. At last he smiled, "So, you like it, Rashid?"

"Presence, your slave considers himself privileged to have such sweet, such touching, such deep, such, such—*Hazur*, what can I say? I am illiterate, and to say anything would be a piece of impertinence."

"Don't be afraid, Rashid. You know how to please your master. You will be rewarded. Here, take this."

Rashid made a thrice-repeated low salaam, and extended both his hands to receive a silver rupee. He salaamed again, and stepped back.

"Sire, the Resident Bahadur wishes to pay his respects to Your Highness."

At once, Abu Zafar became flustered, he pushed away the sheets of paper lying before him, and slipped his feet into his shoes. "Let him come, let him come," he ordered. "Why do you keep him waiting? What are you looking at, standing there? Go and inform the Resident Bahadur that we are ready to welcome him."

"Presence, he is on his way here. He went to pay his respects to the Refuge of the World, and I came ahead to inform Your Highness."

Abu Zafar received Seton at the main entrance to his apartment. Both men greeted each other with the exaggerated politeness characteristic of the Mughal court. They shook hands and made detailed and prolonged enquiries about each other's health and well-being. Abu Zafar, then, led his visitor to his best sit-

ting-room where there was a divan alongside a wall, and a threadbare carpet on the floor. Two low wooden tables and a brass stool completed the furniture of the room. Abu Zafar motioned Seton to the divan, and sat down by his side. Seton began speaking at once.

"Your Highness knows very well, that I have always entertained sentiments of the greatest respect for your noble character. Both because of your being the eldest son of the reigning monarch, and because of the esteem in which you are held by the residents of the Palace and the citizens of Delhi, the British Government has always insisted on regarding you as the future heir to the throne. Your Highness also knows that His Majesty, under the pressure of certain influences, was favouring Mirza Jehangir. He has repeatedly asked me to permit the young Prince to return to Delhi, but I had strict instructions from the Governor-General Bahadur not to exhibit any laxity in this matter. I have, a short while ago, – indeed, I come straight from an audience with His Majesty – I have communicated to the King the final and irrevocable decision of the Governor-General forthwith to confer recognition of the status of Heir Apparent upon Your Highness, so that there are no further doubts or false hopes in other quarters. His Majesty has graciously accepted the suggestion made by me upon instructions from Fort William, and it has been settled that the day after tomorrow, the installation ceremony will be performed in the *Diwan-i-Khas*."

Seton paused, and beamed upon Abu Zafar whose excitement and joy had become increasingly apparent, as Seton's long and deliberately spoken narration proceeded. He repeated, "The day after tomorrow in the *Diwan-i-Khas*."

"Yes, His Majesty has chosen the auspicious occasion of *Bakr-Id* for the installation ceremony. I trust this will meet with your approval."

"Yes, yes. My complete approval. It is indeed a good choice, and auspicious occasion."

Bakr-Id, commemorating Abraham's sacrifice in the land of Moriah and the reward of his complete submission to Allah's command is an auspicious day for all believers, and Abu Zafar took it as a happy augury for the future that he was to be installed on that day. He thanked Seton for all he had done to push his claim forward, and bring the matter to a successful conclusion. Seton, in turn, congratulated the prince on the favourable turn which events had taken. "Praised be Allah," he added with a smile, "for giving His Majesty the guidance to do what is just." He rose to take his leave. Near the door he lingered a moment. "It has been very cold," he remarked with seemingly casual irrelevance, colder than in previous years."

Abu Zafar nodded. He was thinking of the installation ceremony two days hence and the change in his mode of life which the Heir Apparent's handsome stipend would bring about. Seton still stood in the doorway, his short plump figure swaying slightly as the cold wind shook the loose ends of his cloak. He said. "One of the *salateens* died of exposure to the cold, last night."

"Indeed, we had not heard of this," Abu Zafar protested, unwilling to let his mind dwell on the unsavoury realities of Palace life. "We did, indeed receive the report of an old man's death, but we were told that he died of fever."

"I hope Your Highness has been correctly informed. However, I have always been concerned about the welfare of the royal family, and I have brought some blankets which, I trust, will relieve the distress of the *salateens* occasioned by the extreme cold now prevailing in Delhi."

"You have done well, Seton Bahadur. The *salateens* will be grateful to you."

"Perhaps Your Highness will deign to inconvenience yourself by accompanying me and helping me to distribute the blankets. I feel that your presence will create a favourable impression upon these unhappy

dependents of the Court, who will, one day, live in the shadow of your munificence."

Abu Zafar was suddenly filled with a sense of revulsion. The *salateens,* constituting a large body of his cousins, uncles, nephews and nieces with royal blood in their veins, lived in a state of abject penury. Their living quarters consisted of an ugly cluster of straw and palm-leaf shacks which they had constructed inside a walled enclosure. There, they lived in dirt and squalor, like a hoard of sub-humans, drinking, gambling, fighting, quarrelling, stealing, cheating each other, fornicating and adding to their numbers. Many of them were indebted to tradesmen and money-lenders in the city. No legal remedy was available against the defaulting debtors, and even decrees passed against them by the civil court presided over by a British judge could not be enforced, and as long as they remained inside the walls of the Red Fort, they were immune from arrest and attachment. Abu Zafar was quite unable to feel any sympathy or charity for the royal vermin, and the very thought that they claimed kinship with him was nauseating. He seldom went inside the walled enclosure, and was reluctant to be drawn into paying a visit to his ragged, evil-smelling relatives, but he could not, in view of his soon-to-be-acquired status and the obligations which must ultimately flow from it, decline Seton's invitation.

The sun had gone down behind the ramparts of the Red Fort, and as Abu Zafar walked with Seton, he felt the cold bite of the air outside and a tingling sensation on his face and hands. The measured phrases of a couplet began to form themselves in his brain, and he spoke aloud the lines.

Of what avail, O Zafar, are man's scheming and striving,
When He gains His beneficent grace, every wrong is righted.

"Yes," he mused, "my wrongs have been righted. Praised be Allah, he has intervened to protect me.

Men are but instruments in His hands. It was in obedience to His command that Jehangir pulled the trigger of his gun. And by Allah's grace no one was harmed, Jehangir was banished and the impediment in my path was removed."

Seton's men carrying loads of blankets were waiting outside the walled enclosure, and the party entered the *salateens'* quarters through a rickety wooden door which swung back on loose hinges. Almost at once, a mob of maladorous, half-naked, starved beings emerged from the rat-holes of their tumble-down shacks and surrounded the visitors with looks of despair and curiosity on their wretched faces. Then they saw the blankets being laid on the ground. The younger and the less infirm ones rushed forward, and began snatching up the blankets and running away into the labyrinth of their dwellings, screaming with joy. Abu Zafar and and Seton watched the scramble with unconcealed disgust and amazement, but they could not stop it. Abu Zafar felt deeply ashamed and angry, and began hurling abuses at those who stood nearest, but his high-pitched shrill voice was lost in the shouting and screaming of the rabble.

The riot was soon over. Within a few minutes, all the blankets were gone, and the noise ceased. Only a few children and old men with bent, emaciated legs and wide-eyed pathetic faces, remained gazing speechlessly at the visitors from another world. Seton turned to Abu Zafar, and made a gesture of resignation. The party withdrew in silence, and Seton took his leave with his customary deference and ceremony.

Abu Zafar sat in his chamber, waiting for the King's summons. He had woken up before dawn and gone out for a ride on Domali in the forest across the Jamna. In the crisp cold morning air, he had given rein to his mount. After a few minutes' gallop, while his attendants strove to keep close behind him, he had felt a warm exhilarating glow, and the words of his couplet had spontaneously risen to his lips.

Of what avail, O Zafar, are man's scheming and striving,
When He grants His beneficent grace, every wrong is righted.

So, his thighs gently pressed against the Arab's flanks, his elbows softly nudging his sides, the fresh air breathing over his face and pricking his ears, he had abandoned himself to the voluptuous rise and fall of Domali's smooth canter.

Back in the Palace, he spent half an hour exercising his archer's muscles and practising his grip on the high-tension chain installed in his apartments. He had ordered the load to be increased to three maunds, two hundred and forty six pounds. He then drew the chain till it pressed against his chin and lips. After this, drawing the most powerful bow ever manufactured, and shooting an arrow from it was child's play.

After his massage and bath, he sent for his ceremonial robe and headgear and dressed with great care, slowly slipping on the close-fitting trousers of Cashmire wool and arranging the spiral folds below his knees and calves like the threads of a great screw, smoothing out the wrinkles in his newly starched muslin shirt before he fastened the buttons of his *ackhan*. He arranged his brocade cloak and scarf and donned the head-gear of blue silk with a red tassel. Thus dressed, he sat waiting for the King's messenger. The morning was well-advanced, and the sun was up in the sky, casting a clear-cut rectangle of gold on the marble floor near the threshold. The room inside was cold, and the heavy court robes gave Abu Zafar a sense of cosiness and security. The concluding couplet of a ghazal he had read at the last month's poetic symposium came to his mind, and he softly repeated the lines to himself.

Do not deem him man, O Zafar, howsoever endowed with wisdom and craft
Who remembers not God in his hour of abundance, who fears not God in his moment of passion.

The ghazal had been loudly applauded, and he

had been pressed to repeat each couplet several times. It had achieved immediate popularity, and before a week had passed it was on the lips of every street-boy and was being sung by all the foremost professional musicians. To Abu Zafar, now waiting for the moment of fulfilment, the phrases composed in a flash of inspiration, brought a sense of gratitude and humility. He stood up and bowed his head in a silent prayer of thanksgiving.

When he looked up, the King's messenger was standing in the doorway, his body arched forward, offering his homage in a septuple salaam. Abu Zafar drew himself up to his full height, braced back his shoulders, and walked towards the door with slow deliberate steps.

The central hall of the *Diwan-i-Khas* was packed to capacity, and many of the guests and curious spectators from the Palace and the city were sitting in the outer hall and on the open terrace beyond. On the periphery, groups of men in old tattered clothes stood huddled together, shivering in the cold air. Others in military uniforms, in bright gold-embroidered liveries of civilian retainers, stood firm to keep the places they had occupied. Abu Zafar was led through the crowd by a *darban* carrying a ceremonial silver staff. He had to push his way through the thickly packed herd of *salateens*, Palace attendants and servants of European and Indian guests. He made his way through the narrow gangway formed by the more prominent guests. There were two long rows of courtiers, noblemen and high Indian dignitaries of Delhi and of the neighbouring States. He saw Seton, courtly and resplendant in the rich gold and blue uniform of the Resident, seated on a gilt chair. Near him stood his assistant, the arrogant and rough Theophilus Metcalfe. The Hon'ble Mr. Elphinstone, British envoy to the court of Kabul, and the gentlemen of his suite in full regalia were seated nearby.

King Akbar was seated on the Peacock Throne, a new and shoddy replica of the *Takht-i-Taoos* carried

away by Nadir Shah seventy years previously. Akbar at 56, had the appearance of a man in excellent health, possessed of a vigorous constitution. His fair complexion and handsome features were set off by a pair of large sorrowful eyes, dark and brooding. A long greying beard imparted a semblance of wisdom to his sad face. He breathed a confident, self-possessed air, and seated on the throne with his legs flexed under him, wearing his high jewelled headdress adorned with a tall panache and his robe of scintillating gold brocade, he presented a picture redolent of the old Mughal splendour. As Abu Zafar faced him after making his triple salutation, he thought there was, about the King, a strange and pathetic dignity which he had not noticed before. He seemed, for the time being, to have cast away the chains which bound him to the three Begums. There was no curtain behind the royal seat, and raising his eyes, Abu Zafar read the Persian couplet painted on the back wall in letters of gold.

If there be a paradise on the face of the earth,
It is this, it is this, it is this.

He offered his *nazr*, twenty-five gold mohars on a red silk scarf. The King graciously accepted the offering and conferred a suit of clothes on the prince. The clothes were received by Abu Zafar's attendant and placed on one side. Akbar, then, sent for the special Heir Apparent's *khillat* and invested Abu Zafar with it. Wearing this over his *achkan*, Abu Zafar sat down on the special Chair of State which had been kept in readiness, and was now carried forward and placed on the right-hand side of the throne. At once, cries of *Mubarak, Sad afrin*, Praised be Allah, rose in a defeaning, crescendo from all sides. Abu Zafar, now His Royal Highness the *Waliahad* to the Kingdom of Delhi, rose from his chair, stepped forward and presented the *shukrana*, the thanksgiving *nazr*, twelve gold mohars on a red silk scarf. The offering was accepted. Abu Zafar made a low salaam and craved leave to pay his respects to Her Majesty the Queen. On leave being

granted, he went to the inner apartments beyond the *Diwan-i-Khas*, and presented his *nazr* to Mumtaz Mahal Begum across the curtain which veiled her from the glance of *ghair mahrams*, strangers. The Queen accepted the *nazr* and murmured a brief, scarcely audible acknowledgement. He then went back to the *Diwan-i-Khas* and resumed his seat. A few princes and courtiers presented *nazrs* to him in the King's presence, and then the durbar was declared closed.

In pursuance of an old custom, Abu Zafar went to the *Diwan-i-Am*, the Hall of Public Audience, and held a durbar of his own. The greater part of this immense stone-pillared hall was cluttered with old and discarded furniture and lumber and the sweepings which the Palace gardeners and scavangers had deposited everywhere in unsightly heaps. A thick coating of dust lay over everything. On one side, a portion of the floor had been cleared and tidied up by spreading a few old and worn carpets. Here the newly-appointed *Waliahad* received the homage of a few loyal attendants who succeeded, to some extent, in simulating the humility and deference inspired by hopes of preferment.

As the *nazrs* were being presented, Abu Zafar remembered the occasion when Jehangir had ridden out with his unruly retinue and galloped through Chandni Chowk, showering copper and silver coins and trampling on children and old men who ran to pick them up, and were too slow to move out of the way. To these people who had, through the years, witnessed the changing fortunes of the city, watched the display of kingly power and felt the ruthless edge of the conqueror's sword, the exploits of Mirza Jehangir must have appeared pardonable peccadilloes. The Delhi-*walahs* were proud of their traditions, and never tired of relating tales of the city's past glory when in the time of Shahjehan there was a full measure of affluence, peace and culture. But they were tolerant to the point of complacency, and a flabby fatalism made them uncompromisingly accept whatever change it

pleased the Almighty to decree. Were they now paying homage to the new *Waliahad* and reading laudatory verses because they were discerning enough to know him for what he was and measure his true merit, or because they were mere sycophants and time-servers? As he sat on his chair with a debonnair smile, he silently composed the lines of a couplet and repeated them under his breath.

O Zafar, to start with, everyone is a friend,
But the true friend is he, who's a friend till the end.

BOOK TWO

HEIR APPARENT

Ah, cursed spite, if now the saki tarries to fill my goblet of wine,

For the sands of joy are running out, and the round of mirth will soon be o'er.

CHAPTER THREE

THE FORMAL installation of the *Waliahad's* status brought to Abu Zafar not only relief, by putting an end to a period of uncertainty, but also a measure of affluence. Though the King withheld a portion of the sanctioned monthly stipend of Rs. 7,000 without assigning any reason, Abu Zafar received a substantial amount on account of arrears, for his appointment took effect from the day on which the King's eldest son had died and the post of the Heir Apparent had fallen vacant. Abu Zafar bought a dozen Arab colts, acquired fowling-pieces of foreign manufacture, and increased the number of his attendants. He moved into the Heir Apparent's official quarters in Shah Burj, the corner wing of the Palace, more spacious and better appointed than his old residence. He began to hold a poetic symposium every month and to indulge his passion for music and the Kathak style of dance. He gave direction for the printing of his volume of verses and began a final revision of his commentary on Sa'adi's *Rose Garden*. He added to his harem two young and beautiful concubines to whet and satisfy his princely appetite for the joys of the flesh. He had reason to thank Allah for the gifts vouchsafed to him.

But Akbar Shah seemed determined not to reconcile himself to the inevitable. Almost immediately, after Abu Zafar's installation, he redoubled his efforts to recall Jehangir, and began to importune Seton to relax the order which kept his darling reprobate a virtual prisoner at Allahabad. Seton made mention of this to Abu Zafar one day in the course of a casual visit:

"The King says that after Your Highness' official recognition as Heir Apparent, there is no further danger to your person or to the peace of the Palace."

"And do you agree with the King?" Abu Zafar asked.

"The reports I have received," Seton replied, "are favourable to the prince. He seems to have taken his punishment and learnt his lesson."

Abu Zafar persisted: "Will he be allowed to return to Delhi?"

Seton made no reply beyond a slight shrug of his shoulders, and a pursing of his lips.

One day towards the end of April, when the midday sun carried a foretaste of the furnace of May and June, Seton left the comfort and the soothing soporific of his *Bibi Khana* and made a call on Abu Zafar. After the usual courtesies and reciprocal enquiries regarding each other's health had been exchanged, Seton assumed a serious expression and began talking in a quiet confidential manner.

"Your Highness has no doubt been apprised of His Majesty's desire to recall Mirza Jehangir to Delhi. I need not remind you of the firm attitude I have always taken with regard to this matter. Indeed it was my categoric refusal to attend the proposed ceremony of Jehangir's installation that avoided a very awkward situation. And I have, though not without some difficulty, persuaded the King to disband the prince's riotous cavalrymen."

"But, Seton Bahadur," exclaimed Abu Zafar, "They have not been disbanded. They remain in the Palace, and I have often been greeted by their hostile glances."

Seton nodded agreement, "Yes, but now they are members of the King's personal retinue, and their continued presence need occasion no anxiety to Your Highness. My information is that only a few and the less refractory of Mirza Jehangir's men have stayed and the majority of the troublesome Pathans have been ejected. The Governor-General himself gave orders to

this effect. Your Highness knows that the Palace gates are now in charge of a contingent of British troops commanded by Captain McPherson, an able and discreet officer. All entries and exits from the Red Fort are closed, and there is little danger of any disorderly elements being introduced into the Palace."

Seton paused and looked around at the tarnished gaudiness of the room, the faded brocade covering the diwan on which Abu Zafar sat, the soiled cover of the *gao-takia* and finally at the pathetic figure of the Heir Apparent himself, who despite his shoddy surroundings and his melancholy expression was striving to maintain a bearing of princely dignity. Seton had always felt genuine affection for this prince of simple habits and a scholarly bent of mind. There was something sad but loveable about his well-groomed black beard, his broad brow with two vertical lines that became more prominent when he thought or spoke with concentration. With all his fondness for hunting, riding, and outdoor sports, Abu Zafar seemed to live in a tiny world of his own, confined by his poetry, his books, his Sufi philosophy and a complete misconception of his true status and privileges. Seton's task was not a pleasant one, but his mind was a model of neatness, divided into separate compartments which were never allowed to interfere with one another. He resumed:

"I have accordingly made a recommendation to His Excellency the Governor-General that Mirza Jehangir may be permitted to return on giving an assurance of future good conduct."

The lines on Abu Zafar's forehead deepened, as he protested. "But Resident Bahadur, have you forgotten the past, his behaviour towards me, and his conduct towards you. What guarantee is there....?"

Seton brushed aside Abu Zafar's fears. "I entertain no ill-will towards the prince," he hastened to add. "It was no more than a foolish prank, and I do not anticipate a repetition of the misguided piece of folly on his part."

He rose to take his leave. "It is impossible to perpetuate the prince's exile, but Your Highness may rest assured that everything will be done to preserve the peace of the Palace. Your brother is very unhappy at Allahabad, and the reunion with his parents will, I feel sure, put a satisfactory end to this distressing episode."

When Seton had gone, Abu Zafar set down and thought over the matter. "Maybe," he said to himself, "I am being too squeamish and uncharitable. Jehangir must be lonely at Allahabad, and must feel the sting of his status as a younger brother. Be a dog, but not a younger brother. Ah well, I must abide by Allah's will."

He could not but admire the firm and adroit manner in which Seton had handled the situation and his total lack of resentment against Jehangir. He, too, must endeavour to be more generous and win the King's favour. If he expressed his approval of the proposal for Jehangir's return, he would perhaps strengthen his own position as *Waliahad.* It would certainly be impolite and quite useless to oppose both the King and the Resident. He must cheerfully reconcile himself to the inevitable.

Back in his office, Seton sat down to record a note about his visit to the Palace. He took out the file—"Foreign-Political—Mirza Jehangir," and turned over the pages. He quickly ran his eye down his report to the Governor-General, catching snatches of phrases and words, "Furnished with money by the pernicious fondness of his mother, Mirza Jehangir has retained a body of horses...men of his corps...richly dressed...appearance of pomp and grandeur...elder brother...into shade...feeding and fostering...vital sense of his right to be declared Heir Apparent which the partiality of his parents first created...since nourished by the flattery of his dependents...deprive him

of his *risala* of horses." The logic and elegance of his letter was a gratifying reassurance of his competence as a Civil Servant, and Seton smiled to himself in the seclusion of his room. The Governor-General had promptly acted upon Seton's recommendation, and he had no doubt, the proposal to recall Jehangir would also receive His Excellency's approval.

He turned over the page and glanced through the report of Lt. Col. Rutledge, the British Military Commander of the regiment stationed at Allahabad to whom he had referred a complaint about the Prince's behaviour. Rutledge had found no substance in the allegations of misconduct "from the day on which he was delivered to my charge." Rutledge went on to say: "I have always found the Prince very ready and willing to attend to and follow the advice which I judged it necessary to give him... No presents of shawls or any other articles were made by the Prince, and it was absolutely impossible that any females except those of his own family could have access to him. Neither can I imagine or believe that he received liquor or wine of any kind, and I have never known him to be in a state of intoxication or have the least appearance of it...The Prince never dined at any gentleman's house or paid a visit except one evening to me when I had only my own family. And then he behaved and conducted himself with great propriety and decorum..."

"A truly noble and stout defence of an incorrigible reprobate," murmured Seton. "Ah, well, perhaps the leopard has changed his spots."

So, with a slight curl of his lips, he locked up his doubts about the accuracy of Rutledge's appraisement, and began composing the draft of his letter to the Governor-General, and the terms of agreement which Mirza Jehangir would be required to sign before being permitted to return home.

A few weeks later, the Governor-General's reply was received. Jehangir would be allowed to return to Delhi, and the King himself must write to his son

and send him the specific agreement which Jehangir must sign and seal. "It would not only be more consistent," said the Governor-General, "with the principle which was originally adopted of rendering the Prince's temporary banishment the act of the King, but also more delicate towards His Majesty and more gratifying to his feelings to allow the King himself to be the instrument of indicating to the Prince the restrictions to which he is required to submit as the condition of his return."

On the morning of a blazing hot day in mid-June, when the earth, scorched and baked by weeks of unremitting heat, poured out of the furnace of the sun, sent up columns of hot air which made everything quiver before the eyes, Seton made his way to the Palace. He was dressed in close fitting trousers and a long coat made of thick woollen material. Its high collar and a neckerchief pressed against his chin. Over his coat he wore a black woollen cloak. Thus bearing upon his person the proof of the dignity, the prestige and the limitless capacity for endurance characteristic of the superior race to which he belonged, he went to Abu Zafar's apartments and requested his company at an audience with the King. "I have," he explained, "to speak to His Majesty upon a matter of considerable importance to Your Royal Highness, and I beg you to be present. I am sure Your Highness will show the deference due to His Majesty, and refrain from making any observation which might have an effect adverse to your interests.

Abu Zafar donned his ceremonial robes, and accompanied Seton to the *Diwan-i-Khas*. A staff-bearer loudly announced their arrival.

"My respectful salutation to Your Majesty," Seton intoned in his best courtly manner. "May the sun of prosperity shine always on the House of Timur and on its most worthy representative, Mueenuddin Akbar

Shah".

"Welcome, Resident Bahadur," the King answered, wondering what new indignities the visit presaged. "Your coming is a source of great happiness to us, and fills us with overflowing joy. We are also happy to receive our beloved son, Abu Zafar *Waliahad.*"

"Your Majesty is most gracious. I trust that the affection and regard manifested by His Excellency the Governor-General and your humble servant will continue to evoke a full measure of reciprocity in Your Majesty's sentiments."

"We hope," said the King, "that you are the bearer of happy tidings."

"Indeed, Your Majesty, I am." Seton smiled and made a brief bow. He continued in a solemn monotonous voice as if he were reading aloud a despatch.

"I beg leave to inform Your Majesty that for some time past, I have had it in contemplation to address Government on the subject of Prince Mirza Jehangir and submit whether, considering the present circumstances of Your Majesty's family and the conditions of the Palace, his return to Delhi might not now be permitted without again—ah—endangering the tranquillity of the city."

He paused and wiped the perspiration from his brow and neck. He stole a glance at Abu Zafar, standing silent behind him and looking cool and seemingly unperturbed in his loose muslin shirt and robe. The King forwned and signalled to the fan-bearer with a flicker of his eyes. The fan-bearer redoubled his efforts to bring relief to the honoured visitors. When Seton had put away his handkerchief, the King signified his readiness to listen further by a slight raising of his eyebrows.

Seton resumed his discourse and narrated the events which had necessitated the deportation of Mirza Jehangir. He went on to say: "The minds of Your Majesty and of Begum Mumtaz Mahal, the Prince's royal mother, have now undergone so thorough a change

on the subject of what is fit to be done with respect to the His Highness the *Waliahad,* that much beneficial co-operation in managing him and in superintending Mirza Jehangir's activities might, I think, be expected. He himself must, moreover, have seen both the impropriety and the futility of again attempting to risk a competition with the superior rights of his elder brother; and if an improvement of his mind cannot be expected, there is still, I trust, every reason to hope that his conduct will be mild, peaceful and properly subordinate to ah—his parents, his elder brother and his preceptors. Even supposing him to be unruly, or —ah impatient, the influence which his elder brother. . .," here Seton paused and made a gesture of deference to Abu Zafar, "his elder brother has acquired from being raised to the dignity of Heir Apparent will oppose a most powerful and salutary counteraction to any attempts on the part of Mirza Jehangir to raise intrigues, or in any manner to disturb the tranquillity of the Palace. Also the circumstances of the British troops being stationed at the gates and that of Your Majesty's battalion of *najeebs* being commanded by a most able and intelligent native officer who is devoted to us—I refer to Mirza Ashraf Beg—will ensure to us the means of easily and effectually checking such an attempt if made."

Seton paused again. He kept his gaze away from the King's face. He felt, as if by instinct, the King's growing anger and his sense of mortification in being obliged to hear Seton's recital in the very presence of the odious Abu Zafar. He resumed :

"May I add, Your Majesty, that pursuant to the direction of His Excellency, it is expedient to explain to Mirza Jehangir with candour and precision, previously to his leaving Allahabad, the line of conduct which he will be expected to adopt, and the nature of the restrictions to which he must submit."

Seton waited for a response from the King. After a long silence the King asked:

"Restrictions? Resident Bahadur, what restrictions do you contemplate imposing on Shahzada Jehangir?"

"Your Majesty, I had in mind a written agreement by which the Prince would bind himself to—ah—a course of conduct more acceptable to Your Majesty as well as to the British Government, than his previous manner of life."

From behind the curtain at the back of the King's seat, now rose a chorus of protest in women's voices. Mumtaz Mahal Begum, Qudsia Begum and Daulat-un-Nisa Begum all cried out: "No, no, no. It is an affront to the royal family to require any *shahzada* to execute a written document. This can never be, never."

Seton ignored the interruption, and continued on a firm and more lively note:

"In truth, Your Majesty, I feel it incumbent upon me to urge the absolute necessity of the measure I am proposing. This is the wish of His Excellency, and in accordance with his directions, I have prepared a document which I produce for Your Majesty's perusal."

Seton handed to the King the draft which he had drawn up. The King began reading it half audibly, occasionally emphasising a phrase and raising his voice to better comprehend the far-reaching significance of the draft agreement.

"I will never quit the Palace except in the *sawaree* of His Majesty. I will never entertain horsemen, risala ...servant...unfit or improper. I will dismiss him... I will receive my daily allowance from the office and *not* from the private apartment...nothing from the royal revenues or from Mumtaz Mahal Begum...My servants...quiet, inoffensive, respectable...their wages through the offices of His Majesty...."

Seton watched the King's face as he read and re-read the document a second time, and saw him change colour. The King finally looked up, his countenance a mixture of anger, fear and resignation. Seton began speaking again in a slightly more authoritative tone.

He impressed upon the King the inescapable necessity of obtaining Jehangir's singnature on the document. And as the Prince was not sufficiently conversant with the Persian language, it would be advisable to have the contents read out and explained to him in Hindustani before he signed it. He concluded by delivering one of his weighty pronouncements, calculated to impress his interlocutor with the imponderable authority of the British Government behind every word that fell from his lips:

"Otherwise I fear, he may be disappointed, and may even consider his return rather as a state of irksome confinement than as an indulgence. And it further occurs to me that if it were then observed to him in his moment of impatience that any deviation on his part from the letter of the article to which he had fixed his seal would be a violation of his promise to Your Majesty and a breach of his faith to the British Government, he might possibly urge in reply that when his seal was affixed to the paper, he was unacquainted with its contents, a plea which, whether the assertion be true or false, might lead to discussion of an embarrassing nature."

Seton had come to the end of his argument. He stopped speaking, and looked at the King expectantly. The King observed the calm, unruffled, implacable expression on the Resident's face. He sighed and began reading the document a third time. After a long pause, he took up his pencil and wrote in Urdu:

"It shall be done according to this writing, and it is also proper that the undermentioned Mirza execute an instrument of the same tenor and that it be both signed and sealed by him."

Seton received the draft from the King's hand and looked back at Abu Zafar to signify that it was time to take their leave and withdraw from the audience.

Days, weeks and months passed. The delicious

showers of July and August made the burning heat of June a receding recollection. August glided into September, and the rains ceased. The swings which are a feature of the rainy season in North India were taken down, the *koels* no longer raised their shrill calls in the rain sodden foliage of the mango trees. Summer was gone, and autumn, bringing with it a message of winter, made its appearance. This is the pleasantest, the most delightful time of the year in Delhi, when the memory of the oppressive furnace of June has not been completely effaced by the sharp frosty winds of January, and when the mere removal of *khas khas* screens and fans provides a relief from the tyranny of the weather and holds out a promise of the halcyon days of a golden winter. But Mirza Jehangir continued to remain in exile. His return home seemed to be tangled up in the intricate complexities of the administrative machine. The King and Mumtaz Mahal Begum began openly accusing Seton and Abu Zafar of conspiring to keep their beloved son away from them.

One day in early November, Seton sought permission to wait upon Abu Zafar. He arrived in a mild flurry. His manner of smiling and a certain sense of urgency in the movements of his plump limbs indicated that he had something of importance to communicate. This, in fact, turned out to be the case. He told Abu Zafar that the matter of Mirza Jehangir's return to Delhi had, at last, been settled, and the Prince would be leaving Allahabad in the course of the next few days.

"His Majesty, the King," he went on, "was agitated by the delay in implementing the Governor-General's commands, but delay in such a case is inevitable. The return home of Mirza Jehangir is no ordinary event." Seton paused and gave a significant look to Abu Zafar. After a brief moment he resumed in a different tone, persuasive, unhurried, like a lawyer trying to argue a difficult case. "I was considerably disturbed by the currency of a mischievous report that he would

be humiliated and mortified, and this had occasioned much uneasiness to His Majesty. I was most anxious to counteract the malicious rumour and let it be known to all that our decision to let the Prince return meant that he should have the honour due to his rank, and as long as he conformed to the arrangements made in this behalf and showed submission to Your Highness as elder brother, no allusion whatsoever would be made to his former conduct. Indeed, if I may be permitted to submit, I deem it my duty to evince that while the British Government seeks to prevent anarchy, it is just, liberal and generous. So, arrangements, though consistent with the situation, should inspire the Prince with confidence."

Seton paused again and looked around him. Abu Zafar was leaning back on the big round cushion. The vertical lines on his forehead showed prominently in the oblique light from the doorway. His mind seemed to be concentrated on some far off matter, and for a moment, Seton thought that the Prince must be engaged in composing one of his *ghazals*. He moved uneasily and shifted his arm round the *gao-takia* for a more comfortable grasp. Abu Zafar nodded his head and murmured as if to himself, "What you say is correct, Resident Bahadur."

Seton was relieved to have evidence of Abu Zafar's undivided attention and continued: "So, I have requested that a squadron of native cavalry from Gurgaon and an additional company of infantry from Delhi be detached to escort him on his approaching Delhi. I have also requested the stipendary officers of the Government, through whose districts the march road lies, to pay the Prince every attention on his reaching their respective stations. All this has taken time...."

Abu Zafar's attention began to wander. There were more interesting things in the world than the honour due to a pampered rake. His gambols with the new slave girl, the previous evening, had been a delicious and a completely satisfying experience. The

girl had such deep rounded breasts, so firm to hold and to fondle. And the feather she had used....

Seton's deep voice dissolved the beautiful image. "I need scarcely speak to Your Royal Highness of the deep anxiety, I felt on the score of the inconvenience and pain caused by the irresponsible conduct of Mirza Jehangir before his move to Allahabad. Your Highness, no doubt, remembers the written agreement and the restrictions imposed upon the Prince."

Abu Zafar nodded assent. "Please continue, Resident Bahadur," he said.

"Your Highness need now entertain no apprehension of any kind."

Abu Zafar raised his brows. "What am I expected to say to this," he asked himself. Aloud he said: "On the contrary it is a matter of considerable joy to me that Mirza Jehangir is, at last returning home."

"I am, indeed, happy to have Your Highness' assurance in this behalf, and it will be my constant endeavour to preserve the honour of the royal family as well as to safeguard the peace and tranquillity of the Palace."

Seton bowed to indicate his sincerity of purpose and continued:

"I waited yesterday upon His Majesty to apprise him of all these matters, and he was gracious enough to say that he wished Mirza Babar and Mirza Salim to proceed toward Allahabad to meet their brother and escort him home. I agreed with him, but added that His Majesty would not wish Their Highnesses to proceed very far from Delhi, lest from their being unused to travelling, they might suffer from fatigue. To this the King was graciously pleased to reply: 'Do you think it possible that we can trust them from my presence unless you were with them? It is our intention that they should proceed to the distance of three days' journey, which would, then, from their short marches, be a journey of six days, and they should then halt and await the arrival of Prince Jehangir.' As business

will not admit of my attending them, it is settled that the princes will be accompanied by Dilawar-ud-Daula and Nazim-ud-Daula. They will set out in three days' time and proceed to Khurja, three marches away."

Seton began fidgeting with a gold chain that spanned his rotund abdomen between two pockets of his waistcoat. He seemed to be in some difficulty. He opened his mouth once or twice and closed it again without speaking. Abu Zafar said:

"I am happy to hear this, Resident Bahadur."

Seton suddenly made up his mind and resumed:

"During the course of my conversation with him this morning, His Majesty made no mention of Your Highness proceeding with the young princes and my desire to learn His Majesty's real wishes, and to ascertain whether his silence originated in mere consideration of etiquette or whether it proceeded from other causes..ah..connected, if I may be permitted to submit, with his former coldness toward Your Highness, led me to endeavour to give the discussion a turn which might enable one to form an opinion upon the subject. In this I succeeded, and I saw that both the King and Nawab Mumtaz Mahal Begum would be gratified by Your Highness expressing the desire to meet Mirza Jehangir."

Abu Zafar was taken aback. He had observed the calm, unemotional and efficient working of Seton's mind with unmixed admiration, but the scheme to bring Abu Zafar into the framework of his design was a masterstroke which even Birbal, the Great Akbar's cunning counsellor would have applauded. Understanding, suddenly, came to Abu Zafar like a flash of lightning. He saw his way clear before him, and he said with complete conviction:

"Resident Bahadur, we have eagerly desired to accompany Mirza Babar and Mirza Salim to welcome our brother home, but we were deterred by a sensation of diffidence from making a request to His Majesty. But since you have mentioned the matter, and conveyed to

us the pleasure of our royal parents, we shall immediately address a petition in this behalf to His Majesty."

Two days later the three princes left Delhi. They were accompanied by Captain McPherson, Commandant of Palace Guards, Nazim-ud-Din, a trusted attendant of the King, Rajah Sidh Mal, a loyal ally, and a number of selected courtiers to lend an air of dignity to the escorting party. A company of infantry from Delhi, and a squadron of cavalry which had come from Gurgaon, the previous evening, went with the party. Abu Zafar carried a letter in simple and terse Persian, written by the King himself and addressed to Mirza Jehangir, expressing his joy at the Prince's home-coming and admonishing him to conduct himself toward his brothers, and particularly towards Abu Zafar, with respect and humility. In accordance with custom, Jehangir was advised to offer a *nazr* to the *Waliahad.*

The weather was perfect in every respect. A bright sun and a pleasant, cool atmosphere marked the Princes' journey which was performed with princely, ease, and all possible comfort. At each halt the usual entertainment of song and dance, preceded by an interminable feast of sapid and multifarious viands, diverted the princes and kept their mind from dwelling unduly upon the fatigue occasioned by the rhythmic movement of richly caparisoned palanquins swaying on the shoulders of experienced bearers. After a journey of six days, the party arrived at Khurja. Here the princes were met and welcomed by Mr. Halhed, a European Officer who had won fame and the King's approval by his success in suppressing a gang of highway robbers, by his intimate knowledge of the customs of the country, and by his unequalled fluency in the use of Urdu and Persian.

Jehangir was reported to be on his way, and was expected to arrive at Khurja in two days' time. Abu Zafar at once despatched the King's letter entrusting it

to an express camel-rider charged with the duty of delivering it to the Prince personally.

The reunion of the brothers was an effusive display of courtesy and affection. Jehangir embraced each of his brothers in turn and presented *nazrs* to them. Abu Zafar, in turn, made solicitous enquiries about his health and expressed the hope that the rigours of the long journey had not unduly fatigued him. He gave him the news of the Palace, and spoke of the joy which his return would occasion to every one. Jehangir conducted himself with faultless decorum, and his manners gave universal satisfaction. He was led to a richly furnished tent and served with a variety of choice refreshments and savoury delicacies.

In the evening, there was an entertainment presented by the musicians and dancing girls specially sent by the King, followed by a gargantuan meal. The King's cooks had performed culinary miracles, and Mirza Jehangir saw a procession of all his favourite dishes carried in by liveried attendants, *biryani* of six types, rice cooked with spiced goat meat, with fried chicken, roasted partridge and with quails, curries of several kinds, chappatis and flaky *parathas* prepared according to an old Mughal recipe, rich and succulent *baqarkhanis*—fried bread made from flour kneeded with milk and butter, sweetmeats, *halvas* and milk dishes of a dozen kinds. Jehangir's predilection for French wine was specially attended to by Halhed. After the feast there were illuminations and fireworks. Halhed had taken special pains in this behalf and among the illuminations, was a display of the King's titles in cypher the details of which had been worked out after a consultation with Abu Zafar who possessed special skill in the art of composing cyphers.

The cortege conveying the princes made a gala entry into the capital. The route to the Red Fort over the boat bridge and up to Salimgarh was crowded with men shouting welcome. Inside the Palace, a *shamiana* had been erected, and here the King received his son

and conducted him behind the curtain where Mumtaz Mahal Begum was waiting for him. She embraced Jehangir, blessed him and commended him to the protective arms of Allah.

She had vowed to make an offering of a flower four-poster bed and canopy to the holy shrine of Khwaja Kutubuddin Bakhtyar Kaki at Mehrauli, and now wished to fulfil the vow. There was opposition to this measure from some orthodox Muslims who looked upon this form of homage as a kind of idol worship, but Mumtaz Mahal was determined to carry out her resolve and celebrate the prodigal's return. She ordered an elaborate canopy, decorated entirely with jasmine and roses, with a rich border of marigolds. To this the flower sellers added, at their own expense, a magnificent large fan. The offering was carried to the shrine in a ceremonial procession, and laid on the saint's tomb. Abu Zafar's tribute was a poem commemorating the occasion. Everything pointed to a reconciliation between the brothers and a peaceful relationship between the members of the royal family. Abu Zafar and Seton, two persons who had the least reason for wishing Jehangir's banishment to end, showed not the slightest sign of rancour or resentment, and took the most important part in contributing to his triumphant homecoming. Mumtaz Mahal Begum said, "Now, we know that Abu Zafar has genuine affection and regard for us."

It was not long before Abu Zafar realised that Jehangir could not change his mode of life. The canker of corruption had laid a firm hold upon him. Hardly had a week elapsed, when his true nature began, once again, to find expression. The dismissed cavalrymen reappeared and were seen accompanying him. They looked at Abu Zafar with unconcealed hostility and taunting eyes. The clamour of drunken orgies once again burst forth from the Prince's apartments

and shattered the nocturnal quiet of the Palace. Abu Zafar's *chobdar* brought a report that Jehangir had knocked down a child while galloping through Chandni Chowk. A few days later, there were rumours of a young girl who had been smuggled into the Palace. Abu Zafar, while walking in the garden, came upon a woman who rushed up to him and complained that her daughter had been kidnapped. She appealed to him to intercede with the King and have her child restored to her. Abu Zafar was, at first, hesitant, but the woman's distress moved him to write a petition to the King. The King had apparently been already informed of Jehangir's misdemeanour for he sent back a polite and affectionate reply informing Abu Zafar that he had that very day issued orders for the restoration of the girl. Two days later, one of Abu Zafar's wives complained that Jehangir had climbed on to the roof of his apartment from where he gazed down into the *Waliahad's* zenana and made obscene gestures. A few days later, a number of *salateens* came to Abu Zafar and complained that they had been roughly handled by Jehangir and his band of hooligans. "Your Highness will forgive us," they said, "for bringing this matter before you, but the King, may he live long, has turned away the eye of benevolence from us, and his silence encourages the young prince." Abu Zafar expressed his sympathy and suggested that they make a formal complaint to the Resident. Mumtaz Mahal Begum arranged a hurried marriage and provided Jehangir with a charming young bride, but the Prince could not be lured away from the glitter of his wild exploits. He became openly hostile towards Abu Zafar, taunting him and referring to him in disparaging terms. Abu Zafar sent a note to Seton asking for his advice. Seton came to see him. He sighed and said. "Yes, Your Highness. I have been apprised of these happenings, and I have kept the Governor-General Bahadur informed. Measures to prevent further mischief are under consideration."

Seton was, in fact, compiling a list of Jehangir's misdemeanours and the dossier was already bulky. Before the end of twelve months, he sought the King's audience, and spoke to him with his usual deference and firmness.

"Your Majesty, the hopes I had entertained of an improvement in Mirza Jehangir's manner of conducting himself have, alas, not been fulfilled—a circumstance which I venture to believe, has not remained a secret from Your Royal ears. I have here, (Seton pointed at the thick file in the hands of his *chobdar*) the entire lamentable story. I do not wish to inflict unnecessary pain on Your Majesty's parental heart by reviving the memory of the Prince's. . .ah. . .exploits, but Your Majesty will undoubtedly appreciate my anxiety in the matter."

"Indeed, Resident Bahadur, Mirza Jehangir's doings have not been a source of solace to us."

Seton went on to submit that the only course which appeared feasible to him was to persuade the prince to go back to Allahabad. At this the King showed signs of perturbation, and shook his head several times. Seton knew that Mumtaz Mahal Begum, seated behind the curtain at the King's back, was listening to every word. He went on to argue that he was concerned not only with the safety of the Heir Apparent which was a matter touching the heart of Their Majesties and affecting the future of the House of Timur, but he was alarmed by certain irresponsible proceedings to which the Prince had been a party. These happenings had given rise to doubts and apprehensions in relation to the peace and tranquillity of the city itself. This was a matter, he added with his jaw thrust out, with which the Honourable Company Bahadur and His Britannic Majesty were exclusively concerned.

The King conceded the force of Seton's argument, and said he would call his son and reprove him. The

vigorous measure which the Resident had suggested, would he hoped, not be necessary.

"But Your Majesty has already, and on more than one occasion, advised Mirza Jehangir to reform his ways."

Seton now refrained from concealing his impatience, and spoke of the part which the Queen was playing in the affair.

"Your Majesty will forgive me," he said, looking at the King with challenging eyes, "If I draw your attention to a matter which has reached the ears of the Governor-General, a matter of which he has taken serious notice, and in reference to which he has expressed his sentiment of the strongest disapproval. I was obliged to report to him that Her Majesty, Mumtaz Mahal Begum, continues to furnish the Prince with considerable sums of money, far in excess of his sanctioned stipend, and the Prince is thus enabled to indulge in excesses which have darkened the glory of the Palace, and brought disrepute to Your Majesty's name."

Seton stopped speaking. He felt he had said as much as decorum and the urge of his duty warranted. The King, once again, expressed his resolve to admonish the Prince and warn him of the consequences which must flow from his lack of restraint. Seton, making a gesture of resignation, made his salutation and withdrew, saying he would do himself the honour of again waiting upon His Majesty after a few days to seek his pleasure.

The King had not failed to observe the mailed fist reposing under the velvet glove of Seton's courtly manner. He lost no time in summoning Jehangir and speaking to him about his indiscretions. But the royal rebuke, delivered in the soft wrapping of parental indulgence, drew only a sharp and stinging retort from the Prince, who had been carousing with a bunch of luscious dancing girls. He was full of resentment at having been wrenched away from his companions. Copious draughts of French wine had provided him

with insolent courage. Scarcely had the King begun to speak when he lashed out;

"So, Your Majesty has summoned me to make a display of royal displeasure, and not from motives of parental love. I cannot understand the rapid changes in Your Kingly moods which may be likened to the behaviour of a chameleon. One day the Refuge of the World disowns Abu Zafar and declares that he is of base origin. The next day everything is changed. The seducer of Your royal consort is preferred, and Mirza Jehangir, the apple of your eye is cast out. Then, because Your Majesty is prevailed upon by my honourable mother, I am recalled and honoured by the condescension of the *Waliahad.* And now, once again, the river of your munificence is flowing in the other direction."

The King listened to the harangue with rising indignation. But he controlled himself and said: "The Resident Bahadur has been to see me. He complained of the manner in which you have been conducting yourself."

"So, that Looloo, that bugbear, has been intriguing against me, and filling Your Majesty's ears with all kinds of falsehoods. Ah, well, the Mughal Emperor is like a pawn in Looloo's hands and has no independent will of his own." Jehangir paused and assumed a defiant attitude. He raised his hand and shouted: "So, Your Majesty wishes to send me into exile once again. Do it, by all means, do it, do it."

He ended on a high note of anger, and bounced out of the royal presence without making the normal bow and offering his head on an outstretched palm.

The King was indignant and, at the same time, sad. There was only one thing for him to do. He agreed to Seton's suggestion to send Jehangir back to Allahabad.

CHAPTER FOUR

IN A small room overlooking the Jamna, Abu Zafar sat on the floor. An open book rested on a low table in front of him. He was dressed in a plain white muslin shirt and an open cloak of white silk. White cotton pyjamas and a turban of white muslin wrapped round his head in the fashion of a *maulvi* completed his appearance of austerity. A white sheet covering the floor from wall to wall, two framed texts from the Koran calligraphed in his own hand, hanging from nails fixed in the wall facing the door, a *gao-takia* against which he leaned back from time to time, and a plain *shisham*-wood table made up the simple furniture of the room.

It was a day toward the end of March, and the air had not yet lost the freshness of early spring. As the morning advanced, a cosy warmth began inducing a sense of languid comfort. Abu Zafar's eye strayed to the lozenge of the Jamna's muddy water beyond the window. He contemplated the distant phenomenon for a moment, and returned to the study of the book in front of him. He read. "God said: in no way does My servant so draw nigh Me as when performing those duties which have been imposed on him, and My servant continues to draw near to Me through works of supererogation, until I love him. And when I love him, I am his ears, so that he hears by Me, I am his eye, so that he sees by Me, his tongue, so that he speaks by Me and his hand so that he takes by Me."

This, Abu Zafar thought was an appropriate text for his preliminary discourse to the two new disciples

who were comnig to be initiated into the tenets of the Sufi philosophy. The devotee's identification with the Supreme Being in mind, thought and action, the euphoric merging of his soul with the spirit and body of God and the deep all-pervading realisation of truth, the ultimate reality, by a process of looking inside one and performing the entrusted task, instead of striving vaingloriously, arguing fruitlessly and refusing to believe. This was what the Sufi saints had practised and taught.

There was still an hour before the disciples would arrive, and Abu Zafar let his mind play on the rumours which he had lately heard, concerning his half-brother. Jehangir's exit had been like the cessation of a loud discordant noise which, on being stilled, dissolves into a silence louder and more disturbing than the noise itself. There was something ominous and precursive of danger in the quiet which prevailed in the Palace. The *salateens* in their wretched hovels behind the brick-walled enclosure continued their thieving and quarrelling and copulating, but in the King's apartments, there was a strange hush. Akbar Shah had not summoned or spoken to Abu Zafar since the day of Jehangir's departure; no messages had been exchanged between the King and his Heir Apparent, but before many days had elapsed, Abu Zafar heard a report that Akbar Shah was devising plans to recall his favourite son. The members of Jehangir's rascally retinue, the Pathan cavalrymen, the sycophants and hangers-on from the city, and the evil-looking pimps began, once again to frequent the Palace. Abu Zafar heard that the King had sent a secret petition to the Governor-General himself, instead of following the tardy procedure of first approaching the Resident.

And then, about a week ago, a young girl of whom Jehangir had become enamoured during his last visit home, gave birth to a son. The King and Mumtaz Mahal Begum dropped all pretence, and hailed the event with great rejoicing and celebration. They declared that the young infant was heir to the throne of Delhi, they showered their affection upon him in

the most ostentatious manner, smothering him with gifts, presents of clothes, jewellery and toys. They wanted Abu Zafar to know that it was their heart's desire to exalt Jehangir by cherishing his representative in the royal household and abusing him, Abu Zafar, the usurping rival. The King's refusal to pay him his full Heir Apparent's stipend continued to gall him. He complained to the new Resident, Charles Metcalfe, but Metcalfe expressed his helplessness in the matter. "I spoke to the King," he told Abu Zafar, "and also wrote to him, pointing out that he was acting in contravention of the undertaking given by him. But he says that in terms of his original agreement with the British Government, he has the exclusive prerogative of dealing absolutely with the royal stipend in which Your Highness' stipend is included. He says I cannot question his discretion."

"Does this mean, Resident Bahadur," Abu Zafar had exclaimed, "that I am to be deprived of the rights and benefits which Seton Bahadur strove to secure for me?"

Metcalfe's face was expressionless. "We shall find means of ensuring Your Highness' enjoyment of your lawful privileges."

There the matter had rested. Abu Zafar continued to receive only Rs. 5,000 as his monthly stipend, and it was rumoured that the balance of Rs. 2,000 was being surreptitiously sent to Jehangir at Allahabad.

A *chobdar* came to the door and announced that *Ustad* Shah Nazir craved permission to pay his respects before leaving Delhi.

"Convey our greetings to the *ustad*, and request him to come in," Abu Zafar said, and got up to receive his poetry tutor. When Shah Nazir appeared in the doorway, Abu Zafar gave him a warm hand-shake, conducted him across the room and made him sit down on his right.

"So, everything is settled," Abu Zafar said, "and you are now leaving us to brighten the South with the light of your intellect."

"All is due to Your Highness' benevolence and the love you have for this worthless being. Your Highness' personal letter to the Nizam, recommending me for a lucrative post in his establishment, was a command which he was honoured to obey. I have come to bid farewell to my most worthy pupil with an aching heart, but I must go for I must nourish my belly and feed my family."

"Shah Sahib, we shall miss you. We are happy that you will enjoy greater affluence than we have been able to provide. But you know our circumstances. The King, may he live long, has not deigned to give us all that we have a right to receive, and the money we could have utilised for rewarding our *ustad* goes into the hands of whores and ruffians."

"Indeed, Presence, Mirza Jehangir has always sought popularity by largess at another's expense. Your Highness, no doubt, remembers how he used to scatter handfuls of silver coins as he rode through the city trampling on old men and children. Strange are the ways of Allah: the King was abused last month by an importunate beggar because he was not so wastefully generous as his profligate son."

Abu Zafar sat pensive for a moment. Then he smiled and said: "Ah, Shah Sahib, the royal pomp is an empty meaningless show. The King's dignity is hollow and purposeless. Have not the wise ones counselled through the ages that the two most desirable virtues flow from poverty? It enforces abstemiousness, making one do without unlawful pleasures and it engenders trust in God. Trust in God takes man into a partnership of spiritual emotion with him. I daily beseech Allah to give me strength to practise the teachings of the Prophet and of the Sufi sages who have interpreted his sayings. Let us not judge Mirza Jehangir too harshly. Praised be Allah. We have a great deal to be thankful for."

"Your Highness is a saint. God bless you and preserve you."

Shah Nazir took his leave, and Abu Zafar called the new disciples, who were now waiting outside.

For the fourth time, Abu Zafar re-read the *ghazal* he intended to recite at the monthly poetic symposium:

Come, at once, my rose-bodied one, for the morning air is fresh and cool,
The earth is cool, the sky is cool, the house is cool, the park is cool.

He shook his head. No, this was not poetry. It was merely a string of bald and colourless statements measured and rhymed to sound like poetry. The imagery was poor and the idea trite, but his listeners would applaud him and press him to repeat the couplet. They would extol it with the same vigour as they had the lilting lines of another *ghazal* he had composed some months ago:

My heart was bursting with desire to relate my pain and grief,
But when my loved one stood before me, lo, there was no pain nor grief.

"Ah," he mused, "the lovers of poetry are developing a taste for verbal tricks and puns. How far the *ghazal* has travelled from the days of Amir Khusro and Hafiz of Sheeraz. Their *ghazals* remain fresh and moving and are being sung today. Poetry should be sad. The sparkle of joy is evanescent, while sorrow is long and lingering. Oh, to be able to distil the passionate yearning and the silent weeping of my heart and give the quintessence of my true emotions to the world in my verse..."

A *chobdar* came to announce that the poets were gathered and the assembly was waiting for him to inaugurate the *mushaira*. On his way to the *shamiana* specially erected for the occasion, he came upon a young man of striking appearance who stood in his path, obviously waiting for him. The young man was of medium build, with a dark almost black complexion,

a pock-marked face out of which his large bright eyes shone, gazing at Abu Zafar with an earnestness which was at once arresting. Abu Zafar saw that the man's features had a kind of chiselled keenness which lent his countenance a strange fascination. He was dressed in immaculate white from head to foot, a milk-white muslin cap with multiple hand made creases to give it a flat top, a loose cloak of white, lightly starched long-cloth, partly open in front and showing underneath a portion of a white Lucknow chicken-work muslin shirt. His knees and calves were enclosed in clinging white pyjamas, and on his feet he wore a pair of pointed white shoes. The stranger made a low bow, and revealed his identity in a deep rich voice which Abu Zafar found agreeable to hear.

"Mohammed Ibrahim Zauq poet, begs leave to pay his humble respects to Shahzada Abu Zafar, and craves permission to take part in today's *mushaira.*"

"Ah, yes, we know about you," said Abu Zafar, "and now we are glad to know you. We have read one of your *ghazals*. It pleased us a great deal."

Zauq acknowledged the compliment with a low salaam, and stood in respectful silence. Abu Zafar contemplated the black pock-marked face and the well-knit figure of the poet for a long moment, letting his eye roam over the bright whiteness of his robe. Then, acting on a sudden impulse, he said:

"Mohammed Ibrahim, you are welcome to the Palace and to our *mushaira*. Come again, come often. And now, look over this composition of ours, and correct the flaws and weaknesses."

Abu Zafar handed Zauq the ghazal he had written for the symposium. Zauq ran his eyes over the neatly calligraphed lines, and taking a pencil from his pocket, began to improve it, changing a phrase here, altering the order of words there, repeating a line two or three times to himself before making a correction. In a few minutes he had finished and handed back the sheet.

"Presence, do me the honour of glancing over it.

There is little that your humble servant could do to such a perfect piece of composition, but I have endeavoured to obey your command."

So, Zauq, poet and courtier of polished graces was accepted as a member of Abu Zafar's establishment and appointed his *ustad* in poetry.

One day, the following winter, Abu Zafar saw Charles Metcalfe proceeding towards the *Diwan-i-Am* on his caparisoned elephant at a leisurely pace, a mode of transport he preferred to the wheeled carriage his predecessor had used, because, seated on an elephant, he could indulge his passion for reading. Abu Zafar observed the familiar sharp features of a quiet, self-possessed man and his tall hat above the cushioned back of the howdah. Suddenly he looked up from his book, and seeing Abu Zafar, made a courtly salaam. He ordered the mahaut to halt, and descending from his lofty mount, said:

"I was hoping Your Highness would be in the Palace, so that I might have an opportunity of speaking to you. I must apologise for not sending an earlier message to inform you of my visit."

"You are most welcome, Resident Bahadur. Will you so far inconvenience yourself as to come to my apartments."

Metcalfe had not intended to make a personal call on Abu Zafar. His business, though it concerned the *Waliahad* was with the King. The information he had received the previous evening had disturbed and angered him. For a long time now he had been watching, with increasing concern the antics of Prince Jehangir. The latest despatch from Allahabad left him with no alternative. He must see the King and speak plainly. Akbar Shah must be told in no uncertain terms that the British were in India to rule, and they were not going to put up with any nonsense, not even the nonsense of princes of royal blood. In addressing the King he

would dispense with the lengthy hyper-polite greetings which were a tiresome feature of Seton's audiences. He would, without appearing brusque or lacking in courtesy, impart to the King a sense of his determination and finality. Seeing Abu Zafar, he had felt sorry for him and had acted on an impulse to speak of his intention to call upon him. He thanked the Prince for his invitation and said: "I have an urgent audience with His Majesty, but I shall, after it is over, come to Your Highness' apartment and speak of the matter to which I have referred."

"I shall be waiting for you, Resident Bahadur."

Metcalfe walked to the *Diwan-i-Am* with quiet dignity. The King was seated on his high *masnad*, one leg flexed under him and the other resting on its knee. Metcalfe made what might have been called a haughty bow and said:

"I trust Your Majesty is in full enjoyment of your health. I have come to communicate an important decision of His Excellency the Governor-General, and I hope Your Majesty will give it the attention it deserves."

"We are all ears, Resident Bahadur. You may convey to us the submission of our *Fidvi Khas*, our honoured servant and subject."

Metcalfe ignored the galling reference to the Governor-General's legal status of the King's subject. He continued:

"Your Majesty is perhaps aware of an application made by Mirza Jehangir for permission to return to Delhi."

"Indeed, Resident Bahadur?" The King was obviously pretending ignorance and simulating surprise.

"I shall speak my mind frankly to Your Majesty. In my opinion, the return of the Prince will be attended with the worst effects in many ways. His inclination for extravagant expenses and Your Majesty's unbounded disposition to indulge him have made it necessary for the British Government to check him and to moderate

Your Majesty's dangerous partiality. This may be accomplished as long as the Prince remains away, but I apprehend that the accomplishment of our intentions will be unpracticable after the Prince's return to the Palace. I entertain little doubt that the whole disposable part of Your Majesty's establishment will be at his command for his pleasure, pomp, extravagance and consequence. My interference, as Resident, will be continually required, and my differences with Your Majesty will regrettably be frequent, and my efforts will, I feel convinced, be unavailing".

Metcalfe paused. He observed signs of displeasure making their appearance on the royal countenance. When he spoke again there was a note of accusation in his voice.

"I am well aware of Your Majesty's entire devotion to Mirza Jehangir, and I know, on this point, Your Majesty is resolute and persevering. For is it not true that of the establishments, formerly belonging to the Prince, which were sent back from Allahabad, none have yet been dismissed? The elephants, horses, wild beasts, the retinue in all branches are still being supported at Your Majesty's expense, and have been included in Your Majesty's own establishment. Mirza Jehangir's child, born not of his wife, but of a concubine, since his departure from Delhi, is an object of special favour. Hardly could greater fuss be made at Paris about the King of Rome than it is wished to make here of this infant. Your Majesty knows that within the last few days, I have been compelled to interfere with a view to preventing the creation of a separate establishment for this infant for purposes of parade of a description too pompous to be admitted with propriety. The name given to this child is Bahadur Shah, a title assumed by the head of the reigning branch of the House of Timur. I fear, Your Majesty, that after all that has happened, it will be more difficult than ever to keep the Prince within proper bounds."

Metcalfe paused again and stood facing the King,

waiting for a response. The King spoke at last, and there was a touch of asperity in his tone.

"Is it wrong, Resident Bahadur, that a father should feel affection for his son, and make a demonstration of it? Are you justified in drawing conclusions of such a fearsome and sinister complexion from the pious impulses of a parent? Are you not basing the massive structure of your fears on the quicksands of a few childish caprices? Mirza Jehangir is young and incli-ed to be playful. It is an act of cruelty to deprive him of the love of his parents. And do you not consider the state of utter unhappiness to which Begum Mumtaz Mahal has been reduced by being separated from her child?"

Matcalfe refrained from giving vent to a derisive laugh. In a low determined voice he reminded the King of the attempts made by Jehangir on Abu Zafar's life. These, he said, could scarcely be called childish caprices or harmless acts of playfulness. He referred to the shot aimed at Seton which had forced the British Government to send the Prince away from Delhi in the first instance. He spoke of Jehangir's reprehensible extravagance in squandering money among the sturdy beggars and miscreants of the city. "Why," he raised his voice a note or two, "Your Majesty was subjected to an insolent demand only recently when you went abroad with the royal retinue. I myself heard a ruffianly beggar roar out to Your Majesty. 'We got more money when Mirza Jehangir was here.' This is not a trifling circumstance."

The King asked in a petulant tone: "Do you then, Resident Bahadur, keep my son in exile because the people of Delhi are fond of him and consider him larger-hearted than myself?"

"Indeed, no, Your Majesty. We are not alarmed by the consequence of the Prince's popularity with the worst classes of the community, but his spirit of profusion cannot fail to do harm to him and to Your Majesty. Also, the numerous ways in which Your

Majesty has shown superior regard for Prince Jehangir compared with the *Waliahad* tend to degrade the *Waliahad,* hurt his feeling and destroy his happiness. He would most certainly entertain uneasiness for his life, and should Mirza Jehangir come back, he would live in constant dread of violations..."

"Resident Bahadur," the King interrupted, "do you truly believe that the *Waliahad's* life will be in danger if the Prince is recalled?"

"Your Majesty, I am constrained to say that to admit the possible justice of such an apprehension would be to suppose an extreme case. I do not think myself authorised to imagine that Prince Jehangir would engage in a premeditated scheme for the murder of his brother, but it is not impossible that the tranquillity of the Palace might be disturbed by accidental affrays arising out of squabbles between the two princes. Such squabbles were prevented formerly by the prudent management of the *Waliahad,* but the overbearing conduct of the adherents of Prince Jehangir and of Your Majesty's servants is fraught with dangers the extent of which cannot be foretold."

"Do you propose to visit the crimes of the servants upon their master?" asked the King in a petulant tone. "If the *Waliahad* cannot restrain the exuberance of his dependants you cannot hold Mirza Jehangir guilty of disturbing the tranquillity of the Palace. We did not think that British Justice could be perverted to such an extent."

Metcalfe now proceeded to marshal the two conclusive arguments which he had been somewhat loath to put forward.

"Your Majesty has, no doubt, been informed of the unfortunate assault made by one Amir Ali on Prince Jehangir at Allahabad. Mirza Jehangir sustained no injury and Amir Ali offered no resistance to his arrest. In the course of a statement, he said he had been hired by the *Waliahad.* We entertain grave doubts about the truth of this statement. Did he mean to kill or

wound the Prince, or was he merely pretending to do so? Prince Jehangir did not contradict Amir Ali's statement. Local enquiries brought to light a friendly relationship between Amir Ali and one of Prince Jehangir's attendants. Mirza Jehangir either believed that the assault was instigated by his brother or intended such belief to be bruited abroad. There does not appear to be sufficient evidence to charge Prince Jehangir with a direct design to take advantage of the attack on his person to fix on his brother the crime of an attempt against his life. But the evident disposition of Prince Jehangir to encourage a belief in the truth of the pernicious story is highly disgraceful. In any event, the jealousy subsisting between the two brothers must be increased by this unfortunate incident".

Metcalfe paused for a brief moment and resumed his exposition. He spoke more rapidly now:

"If Mirza Jehangir believes that the *Waliahad* instigated the assault, his resentment must be strongly excited. If on the other hand, he fabricated or connived at a false accusation against the *Waliahad*, his hatred needs no addition to make it of a most dangerous and unprincipled nature. On the other hand the effect of such an accusation on the mind of the *Waliahad* cannot tend to inspire him with affection for his younger brother."

"What you have said surprises us," said the King after a brief moment of silence when Metcalfe had finished. "It is not possible for us to express an opinion until we are in possession of the full facts of the case." Metcalfe now prepared to deliver the final blow. He had been instructed by the Governor-General to use the utmost discretion in dealing with the subject which he must now broach. He remembered the exact words of the despatch he had received the previous day. "You will be pleased to employ every effort of argument and persuasion to convince the King that a candid and ingenuous confession of the whole transaction will not only be most suited to his own rank and character, but

will be the most likely means of mitigating the displeasure of the British Government at the conduct of the Prince." He began speaking in a soft conciliatory voice:

"There is one more and final submission which I must make to Your Majesty. You, no doubt, remember that last April, Mirza Jehangir paid a clandestine visit to Lucknow, and he had to be brought back to Allahabad. When questioned about the object of his visit to Lucknow, he tried to exculpate himself by pleading that he had acted under Your Majesty's orders. But he soon perceived the futility of urging such an excuse, and confessing the impropriety of his conduct, offered assurances of conforming to the will of the Governor-General.

Metcalfe looked straight at the King and continued in a cold and deadly tone:

"A few months later, the Prince played the same trick, and in order to cover up his indiscretion, produced a letter purporting to be in Your Majesty's hand. We, at once, suspected that the letter was a document prepared by the Prince to exculpate himself."

The King started, and opened his mouth to speak, but Metcalfe raised his hand and hurriedly went on:

"I must humbly appeal to Your Majesty to consider the matter in all earnestness, before giving utterance to your views. Do not, I pray, under the stress of your fond emotion for Prince Jehangir, be persuaded falsely to admit the authorship of this letter, in order to spare your son the odium of being dubbed a forger. The real circumstances of the transaction cannot remain concealed. Consider the impression which the discovery of the fabrication, after Your Majesty's avowal of the letter as genuine, must make on the mind of the Governor-General with respect to both Your Majesty and your son."

Matcalfe observed a look of pain and suffering on the King's face, and his body sagging as if a heavy burden had been placed on his shoulders. He conclu-

ded by quoting the very words of the Governor-General's letter.

"Allow me to say that a candid and ingenuous confession of the matter will be not only most suited to Your Majesty's own rank, but will be the most likely means of mitigating the displeasure of the British Government at the conduct of the Prince."

Akbar Shah, reduced to a state of humiliation and despair, wrote a brief note in pencil, commanding his wayward son to remain peacefully at Allahabad.

Metcalfe took the note, and made his way to Abu Zafar's apartments. He gave the *Waliahad* complete assurances of the British Government's continued anxiety for his welfare and told him that there was now no question of Mirza Jehangir returning to Delhi.

In July 1821, news was received in Delhi that Mirza Jehangir was seriously ill. Akbar Shah and Mumtaz Mahal Begum were tortured with grief. They accused Abu Zafar of being directly responsible for their favourite son's suffering. "Had it not been for you," the King said to Abu Zafar, "Mirza Jehangir would be with us and in good health." Abu Zafar, close to weeping on observing the distress of his father, said: "Refuge of the World, I have never opposed the recalling of Mirza Jehangir to Delhi, and I beg you to send for him now, before, Allah forbid, something happens."

But it was already too late. Hourly glasses of Hoffmann's Cherry Brandy and the prodigality of his indulgence in the joys of the flesh had destroyed his powers of resistance and the 'something' happened before the King's request for Jehangir's return could be processed through the channels of administration. His dead body was brought to Delhi and buried in the Nizam-ud-Din enclosure. Abu Zafar attended the funeral and shed tears of genuine sorrow. Later, When Jehangir's tomb was decorated and surrounded by ex-

quisitely carved marble screens he praised the artist's work and expressed unreserved approval of the King's love for the Prince.

"May Allah give peace to his soul," he told the King, "he was a good man."

CHAPTER FIVE

"PROTECTOR OF the poor," Abu Zafar's mukhtar was saying, "What can I say?"

There is an ache within my heart, made known will scald my tongue with moans,
But if I hold my breath, I fear, 'twill sear the marrow of my bones."

"What is worrying you?" asked Abu Zafar.

The mukhtar had come to make his weekly report on Abu Zafar's household accounts, and take instructions about some matters. Expenses had been going up and the mukhtar had been obliged to seek loans from the city merchants. Every month he had complained of lack of funds to meet the increasing generosity of the *Waliahad.* But this morning, there appeared to be something more serious on his mind.

"Protector of the poor, the merchants of the city have never hesitated to open their purse-strings at Your Highness' command. They have looked forward to the day when Allah will be pleased to call the King—may he live long—to partake of the delights of Paradise, and Your Highness will be in a position to compensate them. But now your inheritance is about to be frittered away and handed over to the unworthy."

"We have observed the increasing prodigality of Mirza Babar."

"It is not enough for the King," continued the mukhtar, "to bestow his affection upon the Prince and load him with favours. His Majesty and Your Highness' enemies are making away with whatever they can lay their hands on. Of all the cash and jewellery saved

by His Late Majesty, Shah Alam, nothing now remains. When your revered grandfather died there were ten and a half lakh rupees in the treasury."

Abu Zafar nodded assent. He knew that when Lord Lake delivered Delhi from the stranglehold of Ghulam Qadir, the French Commandant of the Palace had placed five and a half lakh rupees with the treasurer and Shah Alam had, by his economies, saved another five lakhs. The mukhtar continued:

"What remains of all this wealth now? The treasury is empty. The equipage and pageantry are gone and nothing is left except a few old elephants, a few miserable horses, a few worn out crazy *raths*, hackneys and some old and unserviceable furniture and litter in the *Toshakhana*."

Abu Zafar knew all this. At the last durbar held by the King, he had noticed that the floor-clothes were shoddy and worn out. They had been hired for the occasion, his men had told him. He shook his head and said:

"What you say is true. The state of the Palace has been causing us much anxiety, but we are helpless in the matter."

"No, Your Highness," exclaimed the mukhtar with sudden animation. "You cannot watch what is happening around you without protesting and doing something to stop it. The latest design of His Majesty will shock you, for it is meant to ruin your future prospects completely. The King is going to sell a large portion of his personal property to Mirza Babar for a nominal sum. This property is Your Highness' inheritance."

The mukhtar stood with bowed head, waiting for his master's response. After a moment's silence he continued:

"Your Highness must, at once, inform the Resident Bahadur, and ask him to intervene. This sale must be stopped. If Your Highness commands, I shall go to the Resident Bahadur this very instant, and tell him what is happening."

Mirza Babar was Jehangir's full brother, and of late, the King had sought to fill the vacuum created by Jehangir's loss, by showering his favours on Babar. It was rumoured that the prince was being paid seven or eight thousand rupees a month out of the royal revenues. The King had also allowed him to command all the Palace establishments, the departments of *Kiladari, nazarat* and all the jagirdars and stipendaries. Mirza Babar had none of Jehangir's predilection for bacchanalian orgies, but he was no less picturesque and eccentric in the manner of his dress and no less prodigal in squandering money. He had developed a passion for the western mode of life, though his knowledge of the western mores was confined to the external and merely visible manifestations of European manners and habits. His clothes were patterned according to army uniforms rather than any recognised style of civil dress. His headgear exhibited an endlessly picturesque variety of Turkish, Indian and European hats and turbans with jewelled and brightly coloured panaches. His coat and trousers carried fantastic trimmings and decorations which staggered the imagination of inquisitive observers. The gold-thread embroidery sprawling over his front lapels in a maze of resplendent intricacy, the shining epaulettes frothing and spilling over from each shoulder, the massive stars blazing forth a glory not of any order of this earth, but of some fairy kingdom, the close-fitting satin breeches bursting at the knees, the black leather top-boots, all lent Mirza Babar a distinction which did not fail to win the admiration of the people of the city by whom the King and the members of the royal family were still regarded with feelings of respect and awe. Babar always carried a thick walking stick, though his sole mode of locomotion was driving in a coach-and-six. He had recently ordered a special carriage from England. When it arrived, he was astonished to see that the coachman's perch was at a higher level than the rich leather-upholstered seats meant for the princely

owner. It was impossible, he declared, for a prince of the royal blood to permit his minion the liberty of occupying a seat more elevated than his own. So, a small wooden board was fixed near the shaft on which the syce had to maintain his precarious seat. When Mirza Babar drove out on this splendid equipage, a horseman rode by his side carrying his hooka furnished with a long serpentine pipe extending to the prince's mouth.

Soon after the arrival of the carriage, he made a formal call on the Resident, at his house near Kashmir Gate. The Resident received him with the ceremony due to a prince, and praised the splendid appearance of the carriage. Mirza Babar was greatly pleased by the appreciation shown by a European, and in an upsurge of pride and exaltation, mounted his carriage with a great show of ceremony. Reclining back, he waved his arm in an imperious gesture. The coachman, inspired by his master's exuberance, shouted his command to the horses, and leaning forward swung his whip twice round in a circle before cracking it like a pistol shot. The horses sprang forward and broke into a gallop. The rider carrying the hooka was left behind, and the carriage raced on, swaying from side to side on the uneven road. Mirza Babar bounced up and down, trying to steady himself by gripping the sides of the coach. Before the stately cortege was out of sight of the horrified Resident, a sudden lurch of the leading pair of the equestrian team dislodged the coachman and flung him head foremost on to the dusty edge of the road. The horses, freed from the galling restraint of their reins burst into a mad joyful flight. Disdaining the normal route home, they struck out into a side lane where there were many adventuresome surprises in the form of ditches, pools of water and mounds of rubble. Over and across these new hazards, Mirza Babar hurtled, swaying from side to side, till a longer and deeper than ordinary ditch received the proud coach and declined to yield it despite the vigorous and

combined efforts of all the six horses. A sudden and violent pull made the carriage lurch and tumble over to its side. Mirza Babar was thrown out. Fortunately he sustained no bodily injury, but his magnificent clothes suffered irreparable damage. A palanquin was made available by some passers-by who stopped to pay their respects and offer their sympathies to the Prince, and Mirza Babar was conveyed to his apartments in the Palace. Among the first to make solicitous enquiries about his health was Abu Zafar who counselled him to employ a more competent coachman. Mirza Babar thanked the *Waliahad* for his concern and advice, and promised to obey his commands.

Despite the outwardly cordial relations between the brothers, Abu Zafar could not but resent the King's unconcealed preference for Babar. The proposed transfer of the King's private property in his favour was more than mere parental indulgence. Abu Zafar made a violent protest to the Resident. The Resident intervened and the sale was stopped.

But Babar continued to exercise absolute authority over the Palace establishments and he freely dismissed or replaced servants and received from them *nazrs* and donations. The King on the other hand subjected Abu Zafar to petty indignities. The full quantum of personal attendants and cavalrymen to which Abu Zafar's status of Heir Apparent entitled him, was never made available, and he had to remain content with only three horsemen instead of fifty, allotted by the Resident. Nor was he allowed to take with him the *Waliahad's* colours and a *naqara* when making a public visit to the city.

Abu Zafar bore these galling insults with scarcely concealed ill-humour. He feared that they were indication of a renewed effort by the King to deprive him of the status of *Waliahad*. Mirza Babar was reported to have boasted that the privileges he enjoyed would soon be invested with all the outward forms which must inevitably flow from the King's declaration of him

as the most deserving son. The vile charge of incest which had been almost forgotten over the years, again began to be whispered about by the King's personal attendants. Abu Zafar strove to conduct himself as a dutiful and obedient son. He did everything a son can do to win his father's regard if not affection, never deviating from the observance of filial respect. He was endowed with a strong bodily constitution, a zest for the pleasures of the flesh and a resilient spirit of mind. With all this he was deeply religious, and learned in the doctrines of the Sufi philosophy. At fifty, with a grey beard, and a face almost youthful, he hunted, shot and practised archery. He rode out each morning and evening and trained his horses. He composed poems and recited them at *mushairas* which he sponsored and financed. He consumed with relish inordinate quantities of richly cooked viands, and indulged his passion for mangoes to repletion, experiencing transports of gastronomic ecstacy when his teeth bit into the succulent meat of the *amba* and his mouth filled with its delicious syrupy juices. He entertained himself lavishly with song and dance, and whenever a new bedworthy charmer was heard of or seen by him, he did not hesitate to give his body the delights it needed and relished, with the enthusiasm of his younger day.

And yet, Abu Zafar was considered a pious man. He entertained fakirs and holy mendicants and discoursed with learned *maulvis* upon different aspects of religion and philosophy. He was generous with his money and gave it freely to the poor and needy fakirs. He made rich offerings to a number of shrines, and in his conversation he gave the impression that money, lands, jewels and all worldly possessions were to him worthless trappings, deserving of the disdain of a superior man. Often when he woke up in the morning with a nightmarish fear of what the King and Mirza Babar were plotting against him, he would offer a quick prayer to God and repeat his couplet:

Of what avail, O Zafar, are man's scheming and striving,
When He accords His beneficent grace, every wrong is righted.

He would then get ready for his hunting excursion across the Jamna and forget the dull forebodings of his mind. Sometimes while watching his favourite dance of the Kathak style, he would let his eyes caress the shapely limbs of the dancer, and say under his breath that as long as God continued to grant him the gifts of Paradise all else was unworthy and beneath his wishes and hopes.

In the year 1825, Mirza Babar died after a brief illness, and Abu Zafar was freed of the gnawing anxiety about his future.

It was a morning in mid-July. The first monsoon showers had slaked the thirst of the sun-baked earth, and the dark green foliage of the mango-trees was alive with the raucous cries of parakeets. An occasional shout from the Palace gardener, followed by the sharp hiss of a mud-pellet, shot from his bow, caused a loud flutter, and a noisy green cloud of birds rose from one tree and flew to another. A cool breeze came wafting over the gradually swelling waters of the Jamna. Abu Zafar sat in his pavilion, a large tray of mangoes resting on a marble top table in front of him. A maid-servant stood by his side peeling and cutting mango slices into a silver dish from which Abu Zafar ate, slowly chewing the succulent fruity flesh. On the floor lay a large basket into which the peel and stones were dropped. He had already eaten enough to fill the basket almost to the top, but the tray was being continuously replenished and his appetite was far from satiated. A *chobdar* called out from a distance that Mohammed Ibrahim Zauq was desirous of paying his respects. The maid-servant withdrew, and Zauq, accompanied by a tall fair-complexioned man in his late twenties, approached.

Abu Zafar continued to eat mango slices and acknowledged Zauq's respectful greeting.

"Nourisher of the poor, accord me the permission to present Mirza Asad Ullah Khan poet, of whom I spoke to Your Highness and whom you were gracious enough to invite to to-day's *mushaira*."

The young poet was elegantly dressed in a well-tailored *achkan* of snowwhite long-cloth from the sleeves of which the carefully wrinkled cuffs of a muslin shirt peeped out. Over his shoulders was draped a cream-coloured silk scarf folded to form a triangle, of which the apex rested over his back while its two corners were tied in a loose knot in front. On his head he wore a tall fur cap from which his long well-combed hair cascaded on to the nape of his neck in a dark wavy sweep. The complexion of his face was almost white with an ivory tone, the features sharply chiselled, the eyes large and almond-shaped, the nose pointed and inquisitive, the lips sensuous without being fleshy or sensual, the chin almost pointed. It was a handsome face with a strangely passionate and questioning look which gave it distinction and invested it with a striking beauty. Abu Zafar's eyes remained fixed on the newcomer's face for several seconds, before he spoke.

"Mirza, we are glad to welcome you. We trust that, by the grace of God, all is well with you."

Asad Ullah Khan bowed low a second time, and standing erect with his hands folded in front of him, replied:

"Allah be praised, I give thank to Your Highness' munificence for the benefits of health and well-being which I enjoy."

This was not said in the flattering, cringing tone of a sychophant but with a dignity and pride which demonstrated that the visitor knew his manners, and could pay homage to a prince consistently with his own self-respect.

Zauq began a long recital of the young man's

virtues and his family history, while Abu Zafar continued to eat mango slices with loud sucking noises. From time to time he nodded and uttered a low grunt to indicate that he was not inattentive. The Prince learnt that Asad Ullah Khan was an Aiback Turk, descended from the established rulers of Iran. According to the custom in his family, the eldest son inherited his father's land and a sword, the younger ones only a sword apiece, while the moveable property consisting of cash, ornaments and furniture, devolved upon the daughters. Asad Ullah's grandfather, having inherited only a sword, made his way to India in search of adventure and fortune. He took up employment in the court of His Late Majesty, Shah Alam, and was assigned the revenue of a *pargana* for the upkeep of fifty cavalrymen. After his death the assignment lapsed. His son had a chequered career, entering first the service of Nawab Asafuddaula of Lucknow, and then moving south to Hyderabad where he remained for many years in command of three hundred cavalrymen in the army of Nawab Nizam Ali Khan. A domestic dispute compelled him to flee northward, and seek patronage in the Alwar court. He met his death while fighting for his master. Asad was then only five years old. He fell to the charge of his uncle, Nasir Allah Beg, a provincial Governor under the Marathas who transferred his loyalty to the British when the Marathas were defeated. Nasir Allah Beg was granted a jaghir, and when he died, Asad, now eight years old claimed the jaghir, as his uncle's heir. But all he succeeded in getting was a small pension which was quite inadequate to support him. He had influential connections, and when he came to Delhi and at the age of thirteen, married the daughter of Nawab Ilahi Buksh, it was hoped that he would soon establish himself as a respected habitue of the court of Delhi. But his true passion was poetry, and his ambition was to be recognised as a great poet like Mir and Nasikh.

Abu Zafar put the last slice of mango in his mouth,

and dipped his fingers in a bowl of water standing on the table.

"Wonderful fruit, the mango," he said, "glorious gift of God to mankind. These came from Lucknow, but I prefer the fruit of Banaras." He looked up at Asad Ullah, and asked: "Which kind do you prefer, Mirza?"

"Protector of the poor," Asad Ullah replied, "there are only two essential virtues which I look for in the mango—abundance of sweetness and abundance of quantity."

Abu Zafar laughed and stood up to go to the *mushaira*.

Asad Ullah was called upon to read his composition earlier than he had expected, for in poetic symposia the best comes last. But he ignored the slight, and read the opening couplet of his *ghazal* with a haughty devil-may-care air, as if he were distributing precious gifts to an assembly of unappreciative youths.

The lover's sigh is deep and long, and needs a lifetime to prevail
But life is short and who can live till your hair be combed and dressed.

There were raised eyebrows and head shakes and a few feeble *wah wahs*. The listeners had failed to grasp the elliptic meaning of his lines. Asad Ullah paused a moment, but the usual requests and cries for a repetition of the couplet did not come. He smiled to himself as if saying: "The illiterate rabble," and continued:

The snare of every ocean wave holds the oyster shell in bondage,
Oh, the suffering and the striving ere the drop becomes a pearl.

After the simple Urdu construction, of the opening couplet, the highly Persianised phraseology of the second couplet came as a surprise. Not many in the assembly understood even the literal meaning of the verse. They uttered a reluctant "good, very good," but nobody showed any enthusiasm or said: "*Mukarar—*

repeat." The third couplet was simpler, though the poetic fancy was elusive.

Patience is the lover's watchword, but his yearning gives no peace,
O, my heart, what colours will you turn before you change to blood.

Asad went hurriedly on to the fourth couplet:

Ah, yes, I'll be persuaded that you will not tarry, but
I'll be dust and ashes, love, before they tell you of my plight.

This was more in line with the tradition of Urdu poetry and the accepted notion of the hapless lover for ever floundering in despair because his beloved makes false promises and arouses false hopes. The familiar idea was cast in a novel and striking shape. At once there were cries of wah wah and shouts of *mukarar, mukarar.* Some began reciting the lines emphasising first one word, then another, to prove that they understood all the nuances and overtones of the poet's meaning. "*I'll* be persuaded," said one, "though no one else will rely on your false promise." "I'll be *persuaded,*" exclaimed another, "though truly even I do not believe you." "I'll be *dust* and *ashes,*" a third repeated, with a shake of his head. "Dust means death and dust means humility, loss of dignity and honour, in short the lover's portion." Was it possible that such deep and intricate feelings could be stated in such simple words, they asked shaking their heads. Ah, each word was crucial, and you could distil all the different forms of the lover's complex emotions, his yearnings, his hopes, his despair and his ultimate resignation by stressing a different word each time. What a clear idea of truth, of transcendental reality the young poet had. It was incredible, it was impossible, it was unfair. An old poet waved his hands and pointed at Asad standing in the midst of the gathering like a prince of the Arabian Nights. Look at him, just look at him, he seemed to say. The mood of the assembly had chang-

ed, and from now on every line uttered by Asad was *taken up and* repeated with loud *wah wahs* and *mukarars. The closing couplet* was greeted by a thunderous applause. It had to be read and re-read several times, and the poets repeated it in chorus:

O Asad, for the ills and griefs of life there is no cure but death,
The candle burns and turns all colours, ere it dies at sight of dawn.

When Asad sat down, there was no doubt that some at least of the more discerning ones felt the unusual depth of his thought, the subtlety and economy of his expression and the vivid sharpness of his imagery. Here, they were compelled to concede, was a poet who had broken away from the current verbosity and the purely formal and hollow lyricism which had become the customary product of make-belief lovers and poetasters. Here, at last, was someone who was not content to indulge in verbal gymnastics, but who had something to say and said it with an uncommon turn of phrase, conjuring up visions at once striking and unfamiliar. But they wished that he would be less obscure and not speak from such a lofty pedestal.

Asad Ullah began visiting the Palace regularly and attending Abu Zafar's symposia, but he remained a controversial figure. When he changed his poetic name to Ghalib, because another poet whom Asad Ullah considered a person of inferior intellect also professed Asad as his sobriquet, there were quite a few disapproving smiles and head-shakes. The young man was giving himself airs, they seemed to say. Zauq never took kindly to him and made no secret of his sentiments, and Ghalib's indifference to the critical attitude of the philistines did not make him popular, but Abu Zafar recognised his merit and continued to make him welcome to his *mushairas*.

Life in the Palace ran its humdrum course. Abu Zafar hunted, shot, watched cock-fights, reared figh-

ting partridges and matched them in long bloody battles, he listened to music and was entertained by dancing girls, he said his five prayers a day, gave alms to fakirs and heard discourses on Sufism. Thus he grew into middle age, while the King dragged on, getting older and feebler, but showing no signs of dying and yielding the throne to Abu Zafar.

And then once again, the serpent of Palace intrigue reared its head.

CHAPTER SIX

ABU ZAFAR was sixty, the king, his father, was eighty. The old man saw the end approaching. Loath to leave the scene over which he had dominated for years, he was anxious, at least, to realise the wish he had lately begun to cherish. He called his trusted mukhtar, Sohan Lal, and conferred with him. Sohan Lal's wily brain was equal to the problem posed by his master. He begged for two days' time to find a solution. When Sohan Lal presented himself again, he craved to make his submission in complete privacy. The King pronounced the single word '*takhlia*' and all the attendants immediately withdrew beyond sight and hearing. Sohan Lal approached his monarch with slow and stealthy steps and began speaking in a conspiratorial whisper:

"Refuge of the World, everything is arranged. By the grace of God, and by Your Majesty's powerful influence, this your slave, has been privileged to prepare a plan which cannot fail to please Your Majesty. The previous denunciation of Mirza Abu Zafar was not considered with the seriousness it deserved. It is manifest to Your Majesty, even as the light of sun, that the only argument which makes a dagger-point impact on the British Government and on the officers of the Company Bahadur is the danger of religious infringement. If they apprehend that any act of theirs is contrary to the Islamic Law, they will, at once, change their policy and abstain from doing what they have in contemplation. They have given a solemn public undertaking to maintain the Koranic law for

Muslims, and the law laid down by Manu Maharaj for Hindus."

"Yes, indeed. We know this very well."

"If Your Majesty will pardon my impertinence."

"Proceed, Sohan Lal."

"Your slave thought that if an authoritative declaration, a *mahzar*, is signed by a body of eminent and learned divines, the Governor-General will not have the unwisdom to act in defiance of it."

For a moment Akbar Shah was afraid. To act in the name of religion might arouse the powers of Nemesis, bring disaster to his offspring and invoke God's wrath on the Day of Judgement. Then he said to himself: "I am only relying on truth and on my divine prerogative as King." He asked Sohan Lal if he had questioned the *maulvis* and if they were willing to give a favourable reply.

"Refuge of the World, everything has been settled. The papers have been drawn up, and if Your Majesty should be pleased to go to the Jama Masjid tomorrow, the *maulvis* will issue the *mahzar* over their signatures."

Even before Akbar Shah gave orders for preparations to be made for his visit to the Jama Masjid, the news of the insidious plot leaked out, and Abu Zafar immediately sent a petition to his father, craving permission to wait upon him personally, and make a most urgent submission. The King sent back an oral message to say that he was too busy with affairs of State to grant even a moment's interview. Abu Zafar sighed and drew up a complaint stating the danger to his status and his future prospects by the King's decision to obtain a *mahzar* from the divines, and despatched it to the Governor-General.

Early the next morning, the King rode on his richly caparisoned elephant to the Jama Masjid. He was attended by the usual equipage of footmen and cavalrymen. The *naqaras*, the great drums on the back of an elephant who led the procession, announced his

presence with thunderous beats. Everyone knew that the King was seeking the assistance of the learned divines to disinherit Abu Zafar, and everyone looked upon the event as if it were a piece of Divine dispensation. The people of Delhi were not concerned with the legality or justice of anything done by the Ruler. The King's acts could not be questioned by his subjects. This was something they had learnt through the centuries. When Mohammed Tughlak built another capital six hundred miles away and commanded them to leave Delhi, they obeyed him without protest. The city was emptied except for an old man who seemed to show reluctance to travel such a long distance in his weak state. He was tied to a bullock-cart, and dragged all the way to Daulatabad, the new capital in Deccan. Only one of his feet arrived there. Prince Dara Shikoh was paraded in chains under the order of his brother, while the people of Delhi watched in silence. The Rohillas and the Marathas came and conquered and took possession of the city, and were expelled by other conquerors. For many years now, the rule of the Company Bahadur had given them peace and comparative security, and what the King did to his sons was no concern of theirs.

At the Jama Masjid, the court of the *maulvis* was waiting for the King. The document, containing a single question and the answer of the divines, was ready. The King read out the question which had been framed by the *maulvis* themselves.

"What say the learned in the Faith and the Muftis of the steadfast precepts of the law, in the case of a person having born to him several sons and several daughters from different wombs—one of these sons being from the womb of a married woman and the rest being the issue of unmarried women and not being eligible by *milk yamin* nor in the predicament of *muta bul shubuh,* or offspring of cohabitation by mistake (on delusion that the woman cohabited with was the wife)? Which of these children will be heir to that

person?"

The answer was read out by the Mufti in a sing-song recitative:

"That child or person is heir who is the offspring of *nikah*, legal marriage, and the others are excluded from the right of inheritance, because the heritage of the offspring depends upon legitimacy, and those who are illegitimate are excluded from inheritance."

The Mufti went on to state the four types of marriage, of which only one, *nikah sahi*, or marriage in the presence of witness, conferred legitimacy on the offspring. The child born of a slave girl or of a strange woman who was wrongly believed to be a lawful wife could not be looked upon as legitimate, and must, therefore, be excluded from inheritance. The Mufti concluded his pronouncement hurriedly, pausing only to emphasise the last sentence of his judgement: "The lineage of a bastard is traced to the mother, and not to the father who is a fornicator. The offspring not born of *nikah* or wedlock does not become heir to the estate of the father who was a fornicator, but the spurious offspring is heir to the mother. All Mohammedans are agreed in this wise, and there is no true lineage or consanguinity, and if he claims the lineage of his father, it is incumbent on the Qazi to bar it."

The five *maulvis* present affixed their signatures to the *fatwa* and handed it to the King. Akbar made a larger than usual offering and returned to the Palace.

Within an hour, Akbar Shah received a humble petition from Prince Saleem claiming the status of Heir Apparent, on the ground of his being the offspring of a legally wedded wife. "It is strange," the petition said, "that I, as the rightful heir to Your Majesty, have not attained this status. If Your Majesty's mind has been influenced or controlled by considerations connected with the British Government, I may be permitted to say that I myself have hitherto refrained from obtruding my claim for similar considerations,

but it has now been established beyond a doubt that the British authorities do not, from their love of justice, deviate in the slightest degree from the strictest rules of rectitude and equity, since they uphold the administration of justice toward Muslim subjects according to Muslim laws. Muftis and *Sadar Immams* have been appointed to take cognizance of and decide cases between Muslims, and Pundits to award justice to Hindus. What a praiseworthy thing it is that the government is incurring an expenditure of thousands of rupees to achieve this object. Remembering the ways and means and facilities the British authorities have afforded to secure every one his rights, it cannot be supposed that they would oppose my just right which has been clearly established according to the tenets of all faiths..."

There was much more in the same strain, and the petition concluded by humbly requesting His Majesty graciously to put the petitioner in possession of his undoubted right.

The King wrote a personal letter to the Governor-General, forwarding Mirza Saleem's petition and making a strong plea on his behalf. "As it was particularly incumbent on us and generally on all to whom the administration of justice is entrusted, to act in conformity with the doctrines of our laws, we felt anxious to institute enquiries. The right of our beloved son has been fully established by the tenets of our religion. Maulvi Mohammed Ishaq, Maulvi Mohammed Imam, celebrated in the world for their wisdom and erudition, have according to Koranic Law, given their decision on this question. The judgement is one which none can dispute, and we transmit a copy for your perusal."

But the King's strong recommendation and the authoritative *mahzar* failed to move the Governor-General, Sir Charles Metcalfe, who had, during his stay at Delhi, as Resident, learnt enough about the King and his court. He wrote a polite letter entreating Akbar Shah to dismiss from his mind all hope of dis-

turbing the arrangements which the British Government had deliberately resolved to adopt. He pointed out that any further discussion of the subject must tend to detract from the dignity of His Majesty, without being productive of the least benefit to any party.

Metcalfe, also sent a letter to Abu Zafar reassuring him and dispelling his fears and doubts.

Abu Zafar was delighted beyond measure, and at once, wrote a grateful acknowledgement, thanking his honourable esteemed friend for the "friendly amber-scented communication" which he had received in a moment of anxiety. "The garden of our friendship," he said, "has been refreshed by the verdure of spring in which the soul is entranced by gratitude and excites those emotions which strengthen the bond of sincerity and affection. It has dispelled all the mischief wrought by my enemies through the machinations of those baneful and influential intrigues now forming the counsel of His Majesty in Delhi. I have received that confidence which your communication was intended to convey. The intrigue and corruption practised at His Majesty's court are well known to you, and need not be reiterated. Their infidelity and roguery will, in the maturity of time, confound them and make them ashamed, but when I remember the illiberal and illegal opposition manifested at my appointment and confirmation as Heir Apparent which was overcome through the kindness and justice of the British Government, and which was bred in the bosom of those adverse to my prosperity: when I remember the ill-will, jealousy and discontent of these people, I cannot but thank God. The hopes they had cherished of witnessing my downfall and their own exaltation have, in a measure, subsided and a reluctant calmness is spread over the question which, so long, disturbed the tranquillity and happiness of the royal house of Delhi. But, nevertheless, their discontent provokes their still willing and wrangling animosity to invent new schemes of disorder for inconveniencing me and my household

which had affected me so far as to incline me to banish myself from the palace which was baneful to me as a residence and which became the free-hold of my enemies. . ."

There was a great deal more, several pages of it, in the same strain, expressing Abu Zafar's gratitude to the British Government and his horrible fears of a disastrous plot prepared by the King with the help of the wily Sohan Lal and Mirza Saleem. It was mentioned that the King had signed a dower-deed in favour of Mumtaz Mahal Begum, acknowledging a liability of five lakh rupees, and had also executed a bond agreeing to repay (a non-existent) loan of a similar sum. This liability of ten lakhs was made a charge on the King's personal property, so that when Abu Zafar succeeded to the throne, he would find the treasury empty, and his estate insolvent.

The civil servants at Fort William drafted a brief reply to Abu Zafar's pathetic screed and placed it before the Governor-General for his signature. "Your Royal Highness has been already informed that you have no reason to fear any result prejudicial to your interest from the machinations of your enemies."

Days, weeks and months crept slowly by. Two summers and a winter came and went. The King celebrated his eighty-second birthday. He looked weaker and frailer, but his dislike of Abu Zafar remained as uncompromising and unconcealed as ever. Abu Zafar, for his part, made no attempt to ingratiate himself into the King's favour. His relations with Akbar Shah were governed by the unwritten rules of Palace etiquette. He conducted himself towards his parent as a subject towards his sovereign. Three times a year, father and son came face to face on the occasions of the two Ids and the King's Birthday. For the rest Abu Zafar lived his own life, hunting, shooting, watching partridge fights, composing poems, entertain-

ing himself with dance and song and paying homage to his favourite saints.

It was the middle of September 1837. Abu Zafar heard that the King was suffering from a cold which his physician thought was a mild ailment, but which, nevertheless, confined him to bed. As the days dragged on, his condition deteriorated, and at the end of a week, it began to be whispered about that the end was approaching. Abu Zafar wanted to pay a visit of sympathy and inquire after his aged parent's health, but Mumtaz Mahal Begum declined permission. He passed three days in a state of agitation, sleeping fitfully and pacing up and down his chamber. On the fourth day, he ordered that the crown and the royal robes be brought to his apartments. When his orders were carried out without any protest on the part of the King's mukhtar, Abu Zafar realised that the King was in fact dying, and the courtiers had already accepted him as the new and rightful ruler of the kingdom of Delhi.

On the evening of September 28, the King was reported to be sinking. The physicians attending on him prepared for an all-night bed-side vigil. The Queen Mumtaz Mahal Begum, sat behind a curtain draped along one side of the bed. Her moans and sobs could be heard by the physicians and the attendants grimly watching the King's prostrate form. His fair skin had turned an ashy grey, and lay stretched over his bones like dried parchment. His silvery beard had lost its bright sheen. The eyes were closed. The strangely calm unchanging appearance of the countenance indicated that a stage had been reached when life was slowly, silently and painlessly slipping out of the inert body. Now and again, one of the physicians felt the patient's pulse and shook his head, marvelling at the tenacity of the frail, decayed body that continued to retain a tenuous lingering hold on life.

In his apartments, Abu Zafar gave directions that the Peacock Throne be brought out of the *Toshakhana*,

and placed in the Hall of Special Audience. The order was promptly obeyed. Abu Zafar sat down on a divan, and began waiting for the moment when he would don the royal robe and crown and walk across to the *Diwan-i-Khas.* His chamber was well-lit, and he had his books about him. He picked up a book and opened it at random, but he could not concentrate on the printed words.

As his eyes roamed over the page, his tongue strained against his teeth to utter a prayer of thanksgiving. He tried to think coherently, to look into the future, to visualise his course of conduct, to formulate plans, but always the prayer he did not wish to utter prematurely drove rational thought out, leaving him as it were stunned. Suddenly, incongruously he began repeating the verses of one of his *ghazals*:

I crave not the beggar's tattered cloak, nor pray for the crown of a King,
Grant me only such measure of reason that with Thy love, I may ever be crazed.
What virtue is contained in books, their pages have been inked and washed.
But Thy commands are inscribed on my heart as the graving on a tablet of stone
Give grateful thanks for the moment of truth that is passed in the flowery garden of mirth,
O Saki, be prodigal and refill my cup, as soon as the nectar is drunk to the dregs,
Oh would that I could by some means or other come to my journey's end
What matters whether I march like a saint or stumble on like a sinner.
Better by far, O Zafar, than the austere invocation of a saint
The moans and supplications that rise from a drunken sinner

He repeated the refrain of the opening couplet—

I crave not the beggar's tattered cloak, nor pray for the crown of a King...

He heard the sound of hurried footsteps approaching. An attendant almost burst through the open doorway of his chamber, and breathless with excitement, spluttered out.

Hazur, Refuge of the World, Shadow of the Almighty on earth, congratulations. May Allah grant you a life of a thousand years. Congratulations. The traveller has departed, *Hazur*, the traveller has departed."

"Allah be praised," softly whispered Abu Zafar, and walked across the chamber to where the royal robe and crown awaited this moment. He turned imperiously to the attendant standing with bowed head and commanded:

"Enrobe us."

With the tall jewelled crown resting securely on his head and the heavily embroidered silk robe draped over his old but still vigorous body, Abu Zafar strode out of his apartments and walked with a quick dignified step to the *Diwan-i-Khas*. Already a group of courtiers had collected, and they awaited him at the far end of the dark ill-lit hall. On seeing their new King approaching, they set up a cacophanous chorus of felicitations and expressions of joy, gratitude, loyalty, praise. As he drew near, a tall dark figure disengaged itself from the group, and standing in Abu Zafar's path, called out in a plaintive voice:

"Refuge of the World, if you deign to grant me my life, I humbly crave permission to make a prayer."

"Who is this?" asked Abu Zafar in a petulant tone.

"Zaheer Ahmad, Your Majesty. Zaheer Ahmed astrologer."

Abu Zafar was now quite angry. The man was blocking his way to the throne.

"Zaheer Ahmed," he exclaimed, "the astrologer of His Late Majesty Akbar Shah. What do you seek from us?"

"Your slave, Refuge of the World, I have served you also and eaten your salt. Your Majesty is learned

in the science of astrology and must have cast the horoscope for this auspicious occasion. Your Majesty will verify the result of my incompetent efforts."

Abu Zafar lowered the hand raised to push aside the importunate man, and asked, "What have you to say? Say it quickly."

The astrologer made a low obeisance, and began chanting a sorrowful recitative. "Refuge of the World, I cast the horoscope to discover the most auspicious moment for Your Majesty to sit on the throne. Your Majesty may deign to wait till day light. The stars presage evil, if Your Majesty ascends the throne in the dark of the night."

Abu Zafar asked in a voice full of wrath: "Evil for whom? Evil for us or for the people?"

The astrologer stammered. "Refuge of the World, *Hazur*, my master, for the people."

Abu Zafar stepped forward, brushing the astrologer away from him with an impatient sweep of his arm. Once inside the *Diwan-i-Khas*, he turned to his followers and shouted. "Bring candles. Bring twenty, fifty, a hundred candles, and light up the hall. We want light. Make haste, go and bring candles."

He stood waiting near the throne while his men bustled about, bringing candles and oil lamps. Soon the gems and precious stones on the polished marble walls and ceiling were scintillating and reflecting back the rays from a hundred lights. Abu Zafar looked about him with a haughty air and said: "Praised be Allah. In the name of Allah, the merciful, the compassionate."

He mounted the throne, sat down and curled his legs under him. Straightening his back and looking up, he announced: "We declare that on ascending the throne of our royal ancestors, we assume the name and title of Abu Zafar Sirajuddin Mohammed Bahadur Shah Ghazi, Badshah of Delhi and of the Mughal Empire."

A loud chorus of congratulations rose in a jumble of confused voices. Men began pushing their way

forward and making their salaams before the throne. Bahadur Shah sat with his spine straight and his eyes focussed on a distant horizon, while his lips twitched and moved in silent acknowledgement. His dark face, in strong contrast to his silvery beard, and his finely chiselled features, the nose long and sharp, the cheek bones slightly high, the eyes large and bright, the forehead wide and smooth, had a striking charm that did not fail to impress the gathering. The uncut diamonds and rubies in his crown and robe, the golden silky sheen of his cloak gave him the appearance of a magnificent gem shining in the centre of a thousand coloured lights.

The hubbub of voices and the scramble for making salaams subsided. Bahadur Shah cast a quick look around and commanded "*Takhlia.*" The attendants and courtiers began bustling and shuffling backward towards the entrance. Soon they were lost beyond the dark fringe of the hall, and Bahadur Shah was alone in the centre of a bright flare of lights. It was still several hours to dawn, but sleep was impossible. The throne was not designed for comfort, but he was soon lost in a medley of thoughts, and ceased to feel the hard wooden boards pressing against his limbs.

He was sixty-two, and if he lived as long as his father, he would have twenty years of power and glory. He felt physically strong. He rode as vigorously as a young man, he hunted regularly, and his eye and hand were steady. True, he could not now draw the Turkish bow with which he had astonished his pupils and attendants twenty-seven years ago, but he still shot more accurately than any one else in Delhi. The English gun presented to him by a European traveller two years previously never missed its aim. But sixty-two years did not mean old age. A Turk of sixty-two was young enough to fight, to conquer, to rule and to exact the homage of his subjects. Timur, the glorious founder of the Mughal dynasty, was sixty-three when he decided to invade India. He had swept across

Iran and Afghanistan, fighting, destroying, devastating, hardly ever leaving the saddle, and by the grace of Allah, he had accomplished his design. Indefatigable, indomitable, unflinching, he had crossed the Indus, vanquished the mountain tribes in less than three weeks, and made a hurricane conquest of the whole of Northern India. He had not stayed, and had said: By the favour of Almighty Allah, we may conquer India, but if we establish ourselves permanently therein, our race will degenerate and our children will become like the natives of these regions, and in a few generation their strength and valour will diminish." How true Timur's words had proved! He had inscribed them with his own hand in his autobiography. Babar had not heeded Timur's warning, and had established himself permanently in India. His grandson, Akbar, had weakened the royal stock by pouring native blood into the veins of his offspring. His successors had done likewise. He himself, Bahadur Shah, was more an Indian, a Rajput, than a Turk. His mother, Lal Bai was a Rajputni. Nevertheless he was a part of the flesh and blood of Timur. He would yet accomplish great things. Timur had said: "It is difficult to take an empire like a bride to your bosom, without trouble and struggle and the clashing of swords." Would there be trouble, struggle and the clashing of swords before he, Timur's descendent and heir, succeeded in taking the Indian Empire to his bosom?

He laughed softly to himself. He must take a bride to his bosom, a young and lovely virgin of noble blood, worthy of his royal status, someone who would make him feel young in bed and be an ornament to his palace. Ah, yes, what he needed immediately was nightly contact with a soft, velvety, pubescent body to arouse his manhood, so that he might attend to his royal business with a fresh and vigorous mind. The practised tiltilations of his slaves and dancing girls lacked the novelty and surprise of an innocent untutored bride. He must at once make known his desire and

initiate steps in this behalf. And then he must turn his attention to affairs of State. There was much that he must accomplish. He must succeed where his father and grandfather had failed. Allah was on his side. Had not all impediments been removed from his path without any effort of his own? Allah would lend him His hand, and guided by it, he would be able to rehabilitate the dignity and the decayed glory of the Mughal dynasty, and re-establish the supreme status of the Emperor of India. He was undoubtedly the legal, the rightful ruler of India. The East India Company and the British in India, right upto the Governor-General, were his subjects, deriving their privileges from the grant made by his grandfather, Shah Alam. They were here on suffrance. He must find a way of not only asserting his true status, but also of making them accept him as their lord and King without reservation. This might not be possible without shedding blood, but *Inshallah,* he would not cavil at that. The Mughal name still counted for something in the country, and if he made a call, there would not be wanting men willing to answer it.

But softly, he must not be too precipitate. "*Dilli door ast.* Delhi is a long way off." What is cooked slowest tastes sweetest. Oh, if only he had lived a hundred years ago when there was freedom to move, to lead armies, to fight and win in open battle, whereas now the King was a virtual prisoner, and his movements were limited and constricted by his own subjects. He had no army, no armaments, no money. The Palace was rapidly decaying into a ruin. The treasury and *toshakhana* were empty. He had no friends and no allies. Was he only dreaming and making plans without any hope of ever being able to achieve a thousandth part of what he longed for. But Allah be praised, he was the King, the King of Delhi, the descendant of the great Timur and younger by a year than his indomitable ancestor when he came to India to vanquish a host of enemies and acquire a new empire. Ah, yes,

he must leave the future to Allah....

The eastern sky was suddenly ablaze with the fires of dawn, and as Bahadur Shah turned his head to look at the breath-taking spectacle, he saw the sun's gigantic tray of burnished copper edging itself above the vast expanse of the Jamna's waters. A long ray of gold lit up a large ruby in the lapel of his cloak. The miracle brought a sense of peace to his troubled mind. The whole of the massive disc rose higher, and detaching itself from the sheet of water, changed its colour to gold and then to dazzling brass. Bahadur Shah tried to straighten his legs, and get up from the throne, but his back was stiff and his legs were numb. Slowly, he uncoiled himself, rubbing his knees and ankles, reviving the circulation of his blood. Slowly he lowered his feet to the ground and stood up. The attendants seeing the King preparing to leave, rushed forward and stood at a respectful distance.

"We shall rest for an hour in our chamber," he announced, "At 11, we shall hold our Durbar, and the public ceremony of enthronement will be performed. Issue orders to all concerned, and let the usual salute of guns be fired, both in the honour of our departed father, and to proclaim our accession to the throne."

He hobbled slowly to his apartments, angry with himself because his limbs felt old and stiff, and his appetites and ambitions outran his ageing body.

BOOK THREE

KING

Do not deem him man, O Zafar, howsoever
endowed with wisdom and craft,
Who remembers not God in his hour of abundance,
who fears not God in his moment of passion.

CHAPTER SEVEN

HAKIM AHSANULLAH KHAN opened a small japanned tin box, and took out a long slim phial. He proferred it to the King and said:

"Refuge of the World, this is the article of which your slave made mention. It is truly magical in its action. It was specially commissioned by the Nawab of Rampur, and prepared with great skill and labour."

Bahadur Shah continued to watch the Kathak dancer. Her drooping eyelids and trembling lips were silently pouring out a flood of passion and yearning straight into his eyes. Her young sinuous limbs were throbbing with the increasing ecstacy of a young bride waiting for her first embrace. She was rendering the traditional story of Radha's anxious waiting for her lover, Krishna, his arrival, Radha's love play and the consummation of her desire. There was something different about the dance of this girl. She was more alive, more intense and more responsive to her unseen lover than Bahadur Shah had observed in the rendering of the same theme by other dancers. Her warm and softly rounded face, her firm and pliable body, her changing emotions and the way she looked at Bahadur Shah, made him feel young again. It was as if she took him for Krishna, the perfect, the eternal lover. A familiar heaviness in his loins began to tantalise him. He was no longer a white bearded old man of sixty-five, but a rejuvenated bridegroom preparing to make the first approach to his virgin bride of seventeen.

The tempo of the dance quickened, the girl was beating her feet at an incredible speed and piroquet-

ing like a top, while a continuous jingle from her ankle-bells kept time with the mad agitation of the drummer's fingers. Dancer and drummer seemed to be possessed by a fiend who had assumed control of them and was making them do impossible things. The tempo went on accelerating. The dancer's orgasmic panting could be heard above the drum-beats. The drummer's entire body was now convulsed by the rapid throbbing of his hands. Sweat was pouring from his chin and nose. Suddenly the dance came to its climax and the girl collapsed on the floor, her ecstasy expiring in the quick breathing of an otherwise motionless body, while her half opened eyes gazed listlessly at Bahadur Shah.

"*Wah, wah,*" he cried out. "Very good, very good, indeed." He turned to Ahsanulla Khan and said: "See that this girl is brought to our apartments. We wish to see more of her."

The Hakim bowed in obedience to the royal command and again proferred the phial in his hand.

"Is this tonic really an efficacious as you say. Well, we shall give it a trial."

Another girl came forward and began singing, making slow descriptive gestures with her face and hands:

The face of my beloved is like the full moon;
The tresses that cover her shoulders and descend to her ankles
Are of the deepest hue of night,
And they sway like the coils of black serpents.
The eyebrows of my beloved are arched like the bows of a hunter
The forehead above them is wide and dazzling like a field of silver.
Have you seen the eye of my beloved?
They are large and long and black.
They shine with the brilliance of stars,
And they are half-hidden behind heavy lids.

The mouth of my beloved? What shall I say of the mouth?
It is so small that poets can find no words to describe it,
And the redness of her lips makes the coral look pale and insignificant.
The teeth of my beloved are of a bright and pearly whiteness,
And her tongue is a live and quivering ruby.
The body of my beloved is a swaying throbbing willow
That makes me swoon and die with desire.

A chorus of *wah wahs* arose from the gathering. A few of the less impoverished *salateens* threw silver coins across to the singer who rose on her knees to acknowledge the applause. Bahadur Shah got up to retire. Ahsanullah Khan handed him the phial of aphrodisiac and a thin paring of bamboo wood, trimmed and smoothed like a knitting needle.

'Refuge of the World," he pleaded, "just one dipping. No more. It is a matter of pride to serve Your Majesty."

Zeenat Mahal Begum, the new Queen, had all the maturity and exciting beauty of a Muslim girl of seventeen who has spent her childhood and adolescence in the guarded but erotically stimulating seclusion of the *zenana.* She had watched the outside world through the chinks of closed doors, listened to tales of gallantry and passion from the lips of more experienced friends, and received instructions from her female attendants in the art of coquetry. She had learnt the use of cosmetics and depilatives. Her full round face, large eyes and a sharp inquisitive nose gave her a provocative virginal charm. The compressed lips were indicative of a hidden firmness of character and determination of purpose. The dark raven hair, glossy and parted in the middle, come down in loose plaits on either side of her long pale-white neck. The figure, full without being plump seemed to have a languid strength which

Bahadur Shah found desirable beyond measure. Yes, he pondered, as he saw her standing beside her maid-servant, she is the ideal beauty, the embodiment of the Arab conception of a perfect female, possessing all the eight fourfold aesthetic attributes. The ancient writers had laid down that four parts of the beloved's person must be white—the complexion of her skin, the whites of her eyes, the teeth and the legs; four parts of her body must be black—the hair of the head, the eye-brows, the eyelashes and the pupils of her eyes; four parts must be red—the lips, the tongue, the gums and the middle portion of the cheek; four places in her body must be wide—the forehead, the eyes, the bosom and the hips; four things must be round—the head, the neck, the forearm and the legs; four things must be thick—the lower part of the back, the thighs, the calves of the legs and the knees, four parts of her body must be fine, the eyebrows, the nose, the lips and the fingers, and four parts must be small,——the ears, the breasts, the hands and the feet. Thus should a perfect women made for desire and love, be endowed.

Zeenat Mahal had all the thirty-two ingredients in her composition. Bahadur Shah felt his years dropping away from him. He would not need the assistance of the Hakim's phial. He dismissed the maid-servant with a wave of his hand, and taking Zeenat Mahal by the hand, led her to a couch.

"Our Majesty is desirous of paying respects to the Queen," he said smiling into her face.

Zeenat Mahal raised her large dark eyes and turned away her head with a scarcely perceptible toss. "Refuge of the World," she whispered, "you are making fun of me."

"No, Begum," the King protested and recited a couplet from one of his *ghazals*.

"The night my lovely charmer had promised to come to me
The lamp of my house lit up with joy as it soon as it was dusk."

He coiled his arms round her neck, and gently drew her to him. "Begum," he coaxed, "by a hundred thousand pretences you may strive to hide what you truly feel, but the eye of love, and the look of desire can never be dissembled."

Later, when he lay in bed, holding her naked body pressed to his own, he suddenly felt old and exhausted. He wanted to recapture the ecstacy and the inexhaustible desire of his younger days. He remembered his youthful experience with a slave girl in her father's harem. She was barely fourteen and had just been brought to the Palace. He came upon her unexpectedly in front of his mother's chamber. Her smile and her little girlish body set his inside on fire, and he felt his loins aching and bursting with a strange heaviness. For a moment he stood, rooted to the ground, watching the defiant restless figure, and then suddenly he had seized the young girl, dragged her to a couch and possessed her with a passionate ferocity to which the girl had responded by clinging to him and holding him tightly between her arms and legs. His father's sudden arrival and his angry invectives had scarcely penetrated to his awareness, and when he finally got up from the couch to face his father's wrath he had felt no sense of guilt or repentance.

Ah, he thought, the vigour of youth has gone, but the desire remains. He moved his hand down the silky soft back of his bride and whispered in her ear:

"I'm old, but hold me tight tonight and fold me in your arms.
So that at dawn, when from your side, I rise I'll be a youth again."

Zeenat Mahal pressed her young breasts and addomen to her husband's body and tightened her embrace. "Your Majesty," she whispered back, "you are not old, you have just given proof of your youthful vigour."

A few minutes later she whispered again. "By the will of Allah, Your Majesty's wish and mine will be ful-

filled. He will grant me a son who will be heir to the royal throne."

Bahadur Shah had eight sons living, and he looked upon all of them as his legitimate offspring, though the mother of only one had been married to him strictly in accordance with Muslim rites. He had several wives and concubines who had, over the years, given him the delights his body craved. The wish expressed by his bride surprised Bahadur Shah. He slid his wrinkled hand down the soft warm skin of the girl's back, to the soft undulations of her buttocks and thighs. Zeenat Mahal clung closer to him and repeated:

"Refuge of the World," she wheedled, "the fruit of our wedding night's love will be your *Waliahad*. Promise, Your Majesty, promise."

"*Inshaallah,* may your wish be granted," the old King whispered back.

In less than two years, Zeenat Mahal Begum had established herself as the favourite queen and counsellor of the old King. Her prediction of presenting him with a male heir was fulfilled exactly nine months after her marriage. The young prince, named Mirza Jawan Bakhat was a handsome infant and a flattering proof of Bahadur Shah's virile performance on his wedding night. Zeenat Mahal gave her husband the devotion of a subject, the companionship of a wife, the appreciation of friendly critic and the physical excitement of a trained and resourceful courtesan. She knew when to withhold the favours of her body and when to reanimate the desires of his fading manhood. Her play with a peahen's feather on his thighs and genitals never failed to arouse him in a manner reminiscent of his young and passionate days. Nor did she made any exhibition of jealousy when Bahadur Shah sought the titilations of a new dancing girl or of one of his more attractive wives and concubines. Though it was galling to see the King's eldest son,

Mirza Dara Baksh, being paid the *Waliahad's* stipend, she made no overt move to have her own son recognised as the official Heir Apparent. It was, for the time, being, enough that she was the favourite queen and the King referred to Jawan Bakht as the apple of his eye and his beloved prince.

In the meantime, she turned her attention to an equally important but more urgent matter. She had, during the first few months of her marriage, observed the manner in which the royal household was managed and the King's monthly stipend dispensed. The man in charge of the King's affairs was a low-caste weaver who had assumed the status of the King's chief minister, and he controlled the entire royal treasure, household effects and the distribution of the monthly income of more than a lakh of rupees. This man, Mughal Beg by name, had ingratiated himself into Abu Zafar's favour and used to manage his affairs when he was Heir Apparent. On his accession to the throne, Bahadur Shah was reluctant to injure the sentiments of an old retainer, and when Mughal Beg begged to be allowed to continue in his service he felt obliged to grant the prayer. Mughal Beg soon fortified his position by persuading the King to confer upon him the title of Nawab Hamid-ud-Daula Mirza Mughal Bahadur. But high honour did not change the traditionally parasitical and unreliable nature of the quondam weaver, and in his new position of greater responsibility and greater temptation, his inherent knavery soon became manifest. He began to steal and misappropriate the royal jewels and funds entrusted to his charge. His misdeeds were discovered, and he was dismissed and ignominiously ejected from the Palace. In his place the King appointed Hamid Ali, a young man of gentle birth from Lucknow. Hamid Ali was more diligent and honest in discharging his duties, but Zeenat Mahal found him too independent and intractable to her wishes. She sought an opportunity to replace him by someone who would be more amenable to her wishes

and demands. She would have liked to become the King's mukhtar herself and to assume complete command of the royal finances and the Palace household, but since she was only a woman this was impossible. She looked for some one over whom she could exercise effective control. But for a woman in the King's harem to have direct communication with a man was out of question. The only males who were permitted to see her and speak to her were the few eunuchs who guarded the royal zenana. Even with regard to these the King had, of late, become unreasonably strict because a fraudulent merchant had sold him a perfectly normal and virile slave, swearing that the fellow had been emasculated by a special operation performed by a foreign surgeon. The masquerader had played havoc in the Palace, and it was some months before the King learnt that his newly acquired eunuch was bedding all the women of the royal seraglio in turn. News of the man's exploits leaked out and was soon being whispered about the city with all the additions and embellishments that a salacious episode attracts. The merchant could not be found, but the slave was severely flogged and expelled from the Palace.

In the establishment of Zeenat Mahal's father, was a highly respected and reliable eunuch who was known to the King. He had often visited the Palace, carrying messages and gifts from her master for the young Queen, and had pleased the King by his good manners and courtly graces. Zeenat Mahal's request to take him into her service was immediately granted by her father and approved by the King. So Mahboob Ali Khan, a plump stockily built person of medium height, and hairless face entered the Palace, and became a member of the King's establishment, with free entry into his private apartments. His unemotional inscrutable features concealed an underlying cunning and a disposition that thrived on intrigue and double-dealing. His immediate task was to act as a messenger between the queen and Hamid Ali, but soon he began

to extend the scope of his activities by giving advice to the King on financial matters. Bahadur Shah with all his dreams of grandeur and kingly splendour was, by nature, lazy and prone to take the line of least resistance. He found it difficult, in his old age, to mobilise sufficient zeal and energy to interfere with the working of his officials. Often he knew that they deceived and cheated him, but apart from an occasional outburst of anger which he soon regretted, he did nothing to prevent the abuse of his trust by unscrupulous servants. Mahboob Ali Khan took upon himself the task of exposing the King's dishonest servants and punishing them with his approval. In this manner he made himself indispensable to the King as well as to Hamid Ali by sparing them many unpleasant scenes and preventing many minor leakages of the royal revenues. He lost no occasion to give proof of his loyalty and his incorruptible sense of duty by relating the details of every sordid transaction he discovered and exposed. He himself acted with the utmost integrity in all matters he dealt with, and never aroused the slightest suspicion of dishonesty or disloyalty. It was Zeenat Mahal's desire to promote Mahboob Ali to the post of the King's mukhtar, but there were two obstacles in the way. The King had great regard for Hamid Ali, and what was even more serious, Mahboob Ali Khan was almost illiterate and was incapable of composing the complex and polished phraseology of court correspondence. He did not know the difference between a *ruka*, a simple note or letter and a *shooka*, a formal court order couched in dignified terms, or a *kharita* which had to be drafted with great care and circumspection in highly polished and formal terms and then wrapped up in a piece of red silk and tied up with a tassel. The appointment of the King's mukhtar had to be approved by the British Resident, and he might, on this ground, decline to consider the claims of the eunuch. Mahboob Ali Khan would have to acquire the necessary measure of literary skill and

linguistic dexterity, before his candidature was sponsored.

Zeenat Mahal consulted her father. He promised to make enquiries, and a few days later, informed her that he had found the solution to her problem. Maulvi Imam Ali, a learned scholar, who lived in Teliwara, outside the city walls, gave instruction in Urdu and Persian to young men of noble families. He had adopted an unusual mode of dealing with his pupils. He worked on a contract basis. He undertook to reimburse the entire fee charged by him if, at the end of the stipulated period of study, his pupil had not reached the requisite degree of competence. It was proof of his tutorial ability and the excellence of his system that during the fifty years that he had been teaching, not a single pupil had complained or demanded repayment of his fees.

Mahboob Ali Khan was delighted by the Queen's proposal, and immediately sent a carriage with an escort to fetch the *maulvi.* Imam Ali, an old silver-haired man, wearing a threadbare woollen robe and a soiled turban, was received and conducted with great show of respect to the apartment where his prospective pupil sat down at his feet and explained his requirements. The *maulvi* stated his terms with promptness and clarity. An hour's instruction every day for a period of one year would make Mahboob Ali Khan sufficiently conversant with Urdu and Persian to deal with all types of correspondence that a mukhtar might be called upon to handle. As he spoke, the *maulvi* studied his pupil, and noted the smooth fleshy contours of his sexless features, the heavy bulging cheeks and lower jaw, and the characteristic eunuch's voice, harsh and unmusical. This was the first time he had been employed to impart the finer elements of his literary craft to one who was neither man nor woman. There was a slight edge to his voice as he added:

"Khan Sahib, at the end of the year, you will be writing the language of Munshi Inayat Ullah's famous

Persian book, *Bahar Danish*. But perhaps this book has not merited the honour of passing before your eyes."

Mahboob Ali Khan listened with awe. Somewhat hesitatingly he mentioned the matter of fees. The *maulvi's* reply came sharp and crisp:

"I shall charge five thousand rupees, half of it payable at once and the balance on the completion of the year's course. Also you must make a carriage available to fetch me and take me back each day."

Mahboob Ali Khan tried to haggle and reduce the fee, but the *maulvi* was firm. He was prepared to depart if his terms were not acceptable. The eunuch had to give in, and sign a bond, containing the terms specified by the *maulvi*. A sum of Rs. 2,500 was paid on the spot, and the course of instruction commenced. Every day the Palace carriage went to fetch the *maulvi*. He stayed for an hour, lecturing to his pupil, making him read and write in Urdu and in Persian, and when he left at the end of the lesson, he took away the exercise sheets to keep a record, he said, of his pupil's progress. Mahboob Ali was a diligent student, and at the end of six months, he found himself sufficiently advanced to draft and prepare every type of official letter and document, but he was avid for more knowledge. Also he wanted to extract his money's worth from the *maulvi*. On the expiry of twelve months the teacher declared that he had fulfilled the undertaking given by him, and Mahboob Ali Khan was able to write Persian prose in the style of Munshi Inayat Ullah's *Bahar Danish*. He demanded the balance of Rs. 2,500 due to him.

Mahboob Ali demurred and refused to pay anything more, protesting that he had learnt no Persian at all, and was indeed entitled to ask for the reimbursement of the advance payment of Rs. 2,500. The *maulvi* lost his temper, and declared that nothing better could be expected from a low-born eunuch.

"How can a man without testicles be anything

but mean and deceitful," he shouted, and drove home in high dudgeon. Nor did he rest content with merely expressing his contempt for the eunuch. He took the matter to the civil court, presided over by a British judge. The suit dragged on for months. Mahboob Ali continued to insist that he had learnt nothing at all from the *maulvi* beyond acquiring the ability to copy a given piece of writing. The judge suggested arbitration and appointed the poet Mirza Ghalib, Mufti Sadur-ul-Din and Maulvi Imam Baksh, two respected divines and Narain Das Patwari who was well-known for his knowledge of Persian literature, to hear the parties and give their decision. The plaintiff placed before the arbitrators the entire bundle of lesson sheets on which his pupil had written progressive exercises during the period of instruction. The arbitrators studied the sheets, examined the steadily improving neatness and calligraphic discipline of successive sheets and ended by feeling satisfied that the defence of Mahboob Ali was false and untenable. They declared that the pupil had acquired sufficient proficiency in Persian to be able to write as well as Munshi Inayat Ullah, and the teacher had fully substantiated his claim. The judge, therefore, passed a decree for Rs. 2,500. When the money was finally sent to the *maulvi*, he said to the bailiff.:

"Tell that castrated attendant of harems that Allah's justice may be slow in coming, but when it comes, it bites hard."

In the meantime, Mahboob Ali Khan was appointed King's mukhtar. The long-awaited opportunity presented itself when Hamid Ali went home on leave to attend to his private affairs. As soon as he left, Zeenat Mahal used all her womanly charm and craft to persuade the King to name her as his mukhtar-in-chief. She had, she told him, acquired a detailed knowledge of the royal household and knew just how His Majesty was being imposed upon and defrauded of thousands of rupees each month. As he himself could not be

expected personally to look into all matters, she should relieve him of all worry and anxiety and manage his affairs with the help of Mahboob Ali Khan with whom she could have direct communication. No one, she assured the King, could be more suited to handle the Royal affairs.

The King agreed, and the Resident accorded his approval.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ZEENAT MAHAL had cause to congratulate herself and feel gratified by the successful issue of her efforts. As mukhtar-in-chief, she could rightly take a greater and more intimate interest in the King's affairs, financial as well as political, and exercise her influence as Queen and counsellor to greater effect. She discovered that the seemingly enormous income of a hundred thousand rupees per month was as far removed from affluence as the cunningly concealed indigence of her father's house was from the comfort and faded splendour of the Palace in which she had now made her home. She was an ambitious woman, and from the very first day of her new life, she began to study the King's true status and the extent of his powers. She had heard that the East India Company, supported by British troops was the virtual ruling power in the country. She now observed that the King was little better than a prisoner in the Red Fort. He was obliged to do whatever the Resident and the British Officials told him to do. He could not go anywhere beyond the walls of the Red Fort without the Resident's permission; and a low-born sweeper, living in the city of Delhi, enjoyed greater freedom and indulgence than the Mughal Emperor, for the sweeper was listened to with attention when he went to the *kotwal*, the police officer, and gave information of the happenings in the city. Inside the Palace, the King was *Zill-i-Ilahi*, the Shadow of the Almighty. He was attended with all the pomp and colour and noise that are attributes of Kinghood. Zeenat Mahal noted the mock rich furnishings and

trappings of the apartments in which she lived, the superabundance and the multifarious variety of the daily meals to which the King and his family sat down. She was appalled by the multitude of servants and attendants, she heard of the numberless departments in the royal household — *toshakhana*, jewel store, armoury, dispensary, the department of drinks, elephant stables, horse stables, camel stables, gunnery, coach-house, palanquin-store, library, pigeon-house. Each department was in charge of its own officer. Then there were the officer in charge of carpets and floor-coverings, the officer controlling the palanquin-bearers, the officer in charge of tent-bearers, the various officers in charge of eunuchs, footmen, cavalrymen, washerwomen, scavengers and sweepers. There seemed to be no end to the variety and multiplicity of the royal equipage.

The King held frequent durbars and ceremonial functions. He was liberal in making gifts to the holy mendicants and fakirs. He patronised poets and painters and calligraphists. He reared cocks and partridges and watched them fight. He rode most mornings to hunt in the forest across the Jamna. His monthly stipend of one lakh of which only sixty thousand rupees were intended for his personal use, was quite insufficient to maintain all the royal pomp and munificence. Furthermore, the Palace was in need of extensive repairs, the *salateens* were rapidly increasing in numbers and their allowances were derisory. There were heavy debts due to *mahajans* in the city.

Zeenat Mahal talked to the King about these matters and sought to find ways of improving the finances of the royal household. In the King's establishment was Hakim Ahsan Ullah Khan, a shrewd old physician who had not only looked after the late King Akbar Shah's health, but had also advised him on public and state matters, and dealt with official correspondence. He now occupied a somewhat anomalous position, for though he was no longer the virtual vizir or prime

minister, he retained the post of the King's Physician, and was frequently consulted upon state affairs. He was a mine of information upon Indo-British relations in so far as they concerned the Mughal Kingdom and could produce letters and documents to throw light upon any doubtful or obscure matter. Zeenat Mahal talked to the Hakim from behind her veil and through Mahboob Ali Khan. In this manner she went over the events of the previous eighty years—a period of futile struggle between three successive Mughal emperors and the British power in India. It was a sad and disheartening story.

In 1761, when Ahmed Shah Abdali left India, he publicly recognised Shah Alam as Emperor, and deputed his lieutenants to carry on the government of the country under his suzerainty. But Shah Alam was without the means of maintaining his position at Delhi, and saw the rising tide of revolt threatening his very life. The Marathas and the Rohillas wanted to capture him and hold him as a hostage. His father, Alamgir II, had been murdered by Ghazi-ud-Din, Imdad-ul-Mulk (Helper of the Country) and Shah Alam's cousin, Ahmad Shah, had been blinded by Ghazi-ud-Din's father. Shah Alam, seeing himself surrounded by unscrupulous and powerful rebels, ran away from Delhi, and sought shelter at Allahabad where his Viceroy, the Nawab of Oudh, maintained a feeble hold over his province. When the British fought and defeated the Nawab, Shah Alam resigned himself to the inevitable and agreed to accept British protection. In exchange, he granted the Dewani of Bengal, Bihar and a part of Orissa to the East India Company. This grant conferred the right to collect revenues from the territory concerned and administer it, but conveyed no political mastery or control over any part of the country. The Nawab, too, was willing to make peace with the Company. It was accordingly settled that Shah Alam would be paid a sum of Rs. 26 lakhs annually and the Nawab of Oudh Rs. 53 lakhs annually.

Shah Alam was not happy at Allahabad where he had been living for some years, and he longed to get back to Delhi. When the Marathas offered to escort him, he readily accepted their terms and was conducted to the Capital in 1772. But there was no peace anywhere for the ill-fated King. The Marathas were becoming more and more powerful, and they began to treat him as their dependent and pensionery. Another man, ambitious for power was Ghulam Qadir Rohilla. It was he who now made an assault on Delhi and took the Emperor into his power. He seized the sixty-eight year old King and gouged out his eyes. Shah Alam tenaciously held on to his status of sovereign and categorically declined to abdicate. He maintained that he was the legal, the rightful King of India, and the Rohillas, the Marathas, the British were all his subjects. They had seized power and rebelled against him, but he was still their monarch and overlord in law. So the years passed, and Shah Alam remained in virtual custody, as Emperor in law, but a pensionary in fact.

In 1803, the war between the Marathas and the forces of the East India Company broke out. It was a war between the King's subjects, and Shah Alam, now a blind old man of eighty-four, felt free to lend his support to one or the other, but he hoped that the Marathas would win. Scindia was his *vakil-i-mutlaq*, his Regent, whereas the British Governor-General had declared that he would seize Delhi, and take possession of the nominal authority of the Mughals. Even so Shah Alam could not offend the British by openly siding with the Marathas. Two days after he asked for British help, he told the Marathas that he would fight the Company's forces. However, when the British won, he welcomed them, and admitted the Commander-in-Chief, Lord Lake, to royal audience.

Lord Lake admitted Shah Alam's royal status, and wrote to say that he was cordially disposed to render

to His Majesty every demonstration of his loyalty and attachment, adding: "I consider it to be a distinguished honour, as it is a peculiar privilege to execute Your Majesty's commands." Lord Lake's letter was among the papers in the Palace archives, and its terms constituted an unqualified admission of Shah Alam's royal status. Shah Alam, for his part, when asking the Governor-General, Lord Wellesley, for protection against the Marathas, had demanded that there should be 'no want of obedience' on the part of the British or cause of dissatisfaction to him.

But power corrupts the souls of men and makes them lose their reason. It deadens their sense of justice. So it happened with the British in India. They were the Emperor's subjects under the Dewani granted by Shah Alam, but when Lord Lake defeated the Marathas and promised to be loyal to the King, he wanted to seize all the money in the royal treasury —a sum of Rs. 550,000. Shah Alam objected, but the man who wields the cudgel is able to drive the buffalo home. So making a virtue of necessity, he said he was willing to make a gift of the money to the Company. The acceptance of the gift would have implied suffering an indignity, so the Governor-General ordered Lord Lake to return the money.

The precise nature of the Dewani rights was discussed and explained to Zeenat Mahal by Bahadur Shah in his talks with her and by Hakim Ahsanullah Khan. Akbar had originally introduced the system of revenue collection and criminal administration whereby the grantee of Dewani rights collected the revenue on behalf of the Emperor and became responsible for maintaining law and order. For the services rendered, the Dewan or Provincial Governor retained a portion of the revenue collected by him, and remitted the balance to the Central Treasury. With the decline of the Mughal Empire, the provincial governors became more powerful and more independent. They began to do pretty much what they liked, and seldom listened to

the faint and distant voice of royalty. Often they went so far as to declare themselves independent rulers, though such a unilateral declaration could not, in any way, detract from the Emperor's legal position. The Nawab of Oudh was the Emperor's Viceroy for the eastern region, and after his defeat by the British, Shah Alam conferred the rights of collecting revenue, administering justice and maintaining an army upon the East India Company. All these functions were to be discharged in the name of the Emperor, and the acceptance of the Dewani connoted an unequivocal recognition of Shah Alam's royal status and of the Company's position as the Emperor's subject. This state of affairs had not been altered by anything that happened subsequently, and Shah Alam's legal status survived his capture and blinding by Ghulam Qadir and his subsequent rescue by Lord Lake. The Company continued to pay him a monetary tribute and address him as "Your Majesty", and assure him of their loyalty. Nor had the Emperor ceased to cherish hopes of regaining the power and glory of ancient days. Bahadur Shah once confided to Zeenat Mahal that his father and grandfather had not been worthy in the eyes of Allah, and Allah had not chosen to make them His instruments.

Shah Alam received from the British an annual stipend of eleven and a half lakh rupees, and a recognition of his imperial titles and court ceremonials. His *de facto* kingdom was within the walls of the Red Fort, and the only persons over whom he could exercise his royal prerogative were the inhabitants of the Palace. He had claimed an annual tribute of thirty lakhs, and Lord Wellesley had mentioned fifteen lakhs, but the actual payments were less. After Shah Alam's death, Akbar Shah made an endeavour to improve his position. He sent his representative to Lord Minto, the Governor-General, at Calcutta with instructions to invest him with a *khillat,* but Lord Minto looked upon this step as a gratuitous exercise of imperial authority

liable to be interpreted by all the states of Asia as a public acknowledgement of vassalage and submission on the part of the British Government to the throne of Delhi. It was one thing for a trading company to submit to the conferment of Dewani rights, and quite another for the representative of the King of Britain to allow himself to be invested with a subject's *khillat*. Lord Minto was not prepared to suffer the indignity, whatever might, in law, be the true position. He declined to receive the *khillat* in public, though he was quite willing to be invested by the Emperor's representative in private, as a token of his personal regard for Akbar Shah.

Akbar Shah continued to press his claim. He tried to send an envoy to the King of England, but his representative was publicly discredited by the British authorities. The royal seal and the letter entrusted to him were taken away from him. The British began to complain that Akbar Shah was aiming at a gradual recovery and exercise of Imperial authority, instead of resting content with the enjoyment of the Imperial rank and titles under the protection of the Company. Were the British thinking of repudiating their legal obligations as the Mughal Emperor's subjects? They could scarcely be guilty of such perfidy, though as Bahadur Shah observed, there were indications of dissatisfaction and an increasing reluctance to accept a subordinate position.

Reminiscing about Lord Amherest's visit to Delhi, Bahadur Shah recalled his own disappointment at not being allowed to lead the Reception Party and go to Mathura to meet the Governor-General. But he had been present at the Durbar held in Delhi and he described the unhappy episode to Zeenat Mahal:

"It was a warm and sunny spring morning in March. The Lord came with his retinue and halted at the gate of the *Naubat Khana*. The Resident and other members of the Governor-General's staff alighted from their elephants, according to custom, and walked

to the Hall of Special Audience, where the durbar was to be held. The Governor-General himself was carried in his sedan chair. As soon as he reached the *Diwan-i-Khas*, the Emperor, on being informed of the fact, came out of the *toshakhana*, and met his visitor in front of the throne. He embraced him and spoke words of welcome to him. The Emperor then ascended the Peacock Throne, and asked the Governor-General to sit down on a chair specially placed in front of the throne to his right. The other members of the party remained standing, as also the chief officers and dignitaries of the court. I and the other princes were just opposite the Governor-General, on the Emperor's left hand side. Compliments were exchanged, and the King took a beautiful string of pearls and emeralds from his own neck, and placed it round Lord Amherest's neck who rose to receive the royal gift. The King then offered perfume to his visitor, and taking him by the arm, led him to the door of the *tashbeekhana*, where they took leave of each other and parted."

Akbar Shah had not felt happy over this visit. Lord Amherest had insisted on being treated as an equal of the Mughal Emperor, instead of as his subject and suppliant who must remain standing and who must offer a *nazr* and receive a *khillat* as a mark of the Emperor's condescension towards a loyal Dewan. He had felt obliged to allow a salute of nineteen guns to be fired from the Artillary Park, on the arrival as well as the departure of the noble visitor. A few days later, the members of Lord Amherest's staff presented themselves before the King and offered *nazrs*. This somewhat assuaged Akbar Shah's injured pride, and he conferred *khillats* on them. Two days later he returned the Governor-General's call. The Peacock Throne was carried to the Residency and placed in the principal room. The King took his seat on it, while his host sat on a state chair to his right, exactly in the manner of the previous ceremony in the *Diwan-i-Khas*, and in the same manner, all other persons re-

mained standing. A variety of rich and glittering presents were brought out and offered to His Majesty. There were 101 trays of jewels, shawls and clothes of various kinds, two richly caparisoned elephants and six hoses with courtly trappings. The gifts were graciously accepted by the King. The Governor-General rose and offered a container full of perfume to his visitor, as the concluding courtesy to his visitor who then took his leave.

"Two days after this," related Bahadur Shah, "I and eight of my princely brothers went to call on His Lordship. Sir Charles Metcalfe came to the Palace and conducted us to the Residency. Our host met us at the top of the steps and led us inside. I was made to sit on the Governor-General's right on a state chair, and the other princes sat below us. I was presented with 51 trays of various gifts, as also one elephant and three horses. The younger princes also received gifts of trays and horses according to their ages. The very next day, His Lordship returned my call. I received him in the Qudsia Garden, and rendered him honours equal to those I had received. I was greatly gratified by the courtesy and the consideration shown me by the Governor-General. But the King was dissatisfied because the old ceremonial and form of address had been abrogated and Lord Amherest had presumed to claim equality with him."

Akbar Shah declined to receive Lord Amherest's successor. In desperation he decided to send a personal envoy to the Court of Directors in London, with a complete statement of his case. He chose Raja Ram Mohun Roy who had a mastery of the Persian and English languages, and was possessed of a presence which could be depended upon to win the respect and attention of the people in Britain. The Raja prepared an unanswerable document, reciting in detail the history of the relations between the Mughal Court and the British authorities, the manner in which the agreed terms had been departed from and a forceful plea in

support of a claim for a stipend of *3 million rupees* per year, in commutation of all prospective claims. "Do I become less entitled," the petition argued, "to the performance of the contract that has been entered into with my family, because my ancestors were great and powerful, and I am feeble and helpless, held down by those who make my weakness and degradation the excuse for their injustice?"

Akbar Shah's offer of renouncing all royal prerogatives for the benefit of an annual pension of three million rupees was not accepted. The Court of Directors agreed to an increase of three lakh rupees over and above the twelve lakhs already allowed. But the additional stipend was not intended for the King's personal use, nor for the use of his sons and daughters, but was to be paid exclusively to specific members of the royal family. The King rejected the increment and the conditions attaching to it.

Thus matters stood when Bahadur Shah succeeded his father. The royal rights and prerogatives were never renounced and the grant of the Dewani in 1765 still defined the King's relations with the British authorities. Bahadur Shah's total income consisted of the annual stipend of Rs. 1,200,000 of which only Rs. 500,000 was his personal allowance, the remaining amount being earmarked for the Heir Apparent and other princes of the royal blood.* In addition there was a sum of Rs. 36,000 received annually from the royal lands.

As Bahadur Shah dwelt on these details of his penurious state, he suddenly felt tired. Zeenat Mahal noticed lines of fatigue about his mouth and cheeks. His shoulders stooped as he leaned forward to look at her sitting cross-legged on the floor in front of him.

"Praised be Allah," she exclaimed and shook her head from side to side.

Bahadur Shah began speaking again with a sudden vehemence which surprised Zeenat Mahal. "We have repeatedly and persistently declined to accept the con-

ditions on which the British authorities offer to raise our stipend. We will never renounce our royal rights, never, never."

"But what are those rights, Your Majesty?"

"Our royal rights, the rights of the Badshah, the King of Hindustan. We may not be able to exercise these rights for the time being, nevertheless they belong to us, and we have not slightest intention of giving them up."

Zeenat Mahal tried to understand. She had a vague intuitive feeling that the British, despite their power and resources had a lurking fear which kept them from forcing the issue, and making a sudden plunge into the dark unfamiliar waters of oriental sentiment. She nodded her head in agreement, and began caressing his knee with the tips of his fingers.

"We told the British," Bahadur Shah continued "that we would not sign any deed of acquittance resigning our claims. We reminded them that from the earliest period, the British have, in every way, been mindful of the welfare and dignity of the Royal House of Timur, and now to demand the renunciation of all our claims is indeed hard."

Bahadur Shah sighed and leaned back, against the *gao takia.* Zeenat Mahal continued the play with her fingers, letting them stray on to the thigh and groin of the tired King. Slowly a sense of peace began to envelope his body and mind. He stretched out his leg and relaxed his tensed muscles, submitting himself to the magic of the young girl's exciting touch. "Bring the feather", he whispered to her, the peahen feather ... and like the other night, here here, between the thighs, my beautiful queen, my life ..."

Bahadur Shah made one more endeavour to extract some concession from the British Government. He appointed one George Thompson, a British subject, his envoy, and sent him with a personal letter to Queen Victoria. In this letter Bahadur Shah recalled the kindness and benevolence of his illustrious ancestor,

Amir Timur, the greatness of Akbar and his wisdom in planting and fostering the tree of friendship with the renowned Queen Elizabeth of England. He deplored the loss of much of the ancient power and grandeur possessed by the royal house of the Mughals in consequence of a series of unfortunate events and, more especially, through the disloyalty of servants. He pointed out that the help rendered by Lord Wellesley had renewed the old friendship. "But," he continued, "now unhappily the present authorities in India have adopted such measures as have totally destroyed the flowers and the name of this Kingdom. The etiquette and tokens of respect which former governors always observed towards this house, have been completely abolished. In consequence I have suffered much ruin of heart in my old age, and am constrained to trouble you. I am now old and have no ambition left for grandeur. I would devote my days entirely to religion, but I feel anxious that the name and dignity of my predecessors should be maintained, and they may descend to my children unimpaired, according to the original engagements made by the British Government."

Thompson was charged with the duty of arguing the Emperor's case before the Directors of the East Indian Company, and pressing his claims for increment in the stipend and the restoration of the courtesies he had previously enjoyed with regard to titles, modes of address, the presenting of *nazrs* etc. Thompson stayed in England nearly two years and wrote back hopeful and encouraging letters. But Bahadur Shah failed to obtain the smallest concession from the British. He wondered if his letter had ever reached Queen Victoria, and began to doubt the wisdom of reposing his confidence in a foreigner, and entrusting the task of seeking redress from the British to one of them.

CHAPTER NINE

AHMADI KHANUM, Superintendent of the King's kitchen, stood watching the slave girls spreading freshly laundered white sheets on the floor of the dining-room. The ritual had been performed by the same girls hundreds of times, but it needed Ahmadi Khanum's presence and repeated admonitions to achieve perfection each time. A fold here, a creased corner there, a slight crinkle at another place had to be pointed out, as if the stupid girls had no eyes of their own. She turned round to greet her daughter-in-law, Nannhi Khanum, who had come to the Palace the previous evening to fulfil a long standing desire to be present at the royal breakfast. She had hurried out from her mother-in-law's room after dressing and combing her hair, so as not to miss any part of the proceedings of which she had heard many accounts from her husband.

"Can I do anything, Ammi?" she asked. Ahmadi Khanum was dressed in white from head to toe, and her clothes and hair threw out waves of a rich, heavy perfume. She waved an indulgent hand to indicate that the slave girls were doing all that was needed.

"What a delicious perfume you have used today," the younger woman said.

"Yes, child," Ahmadi Khanum answered proudly. "This is a special blend of musk suitable for winter." She stroked one side of her head and adjusted her veil, "I have to use scent whenever I wait on the Refuge of the World, for I cannot approach His Majesty, with the smell of kitchen smoke and spices upon

me. And mind you, the perfume must be matched to the season, musk in winter, rose and jasmine in spring, *khas khas,* marigold and sandalwood in summer, *champa* and *maulseri* during the rainy season and in autumn, *raat ki rani,* white rose and violet. But there are dozens of other perfumes and you should see the array of bottles and flasks in the Begum Sahiba's room. Your eyes would jump out of their sockets."

Suddenly she darted away, and began looking at the floor in consternation. One hand on hip and the other raised to let the tip of the index finger rest on one nostril, she exclaimed: "Really now, this is not a hair from my head, for it is too black, nor is it a hair from the head of Khuda Baksha, eunuch, for it is too long. This looks like a part of a horse's tail—it is as thick as a rope." Nannhi Khanum quickly bent down and picked up the offending object, vowing never to comb her hair in such haste again.

Two long low tables with cushions arranged behind them were placed in position, and the room was ready. A moment later, a slave girl, younger and handsomer than the serving women, and carrying a silver staff called out in a loud voice "His Sacred Majesty, the All-high King, may he live long." The royal party was heard approaching, the bamboo screens over the door were lifted, and Bahadur Shah, accompanied by Zeenat Mahal, entered and sat down at the royal table. Prince Jawan Bakht walked in behind them and took his seat at the second table. A dozen young princes and princesses followed and disposed themselves round the table. They had been chosen and invited by the King himself according to custom. A procession of slave girls began carrying dishes full of meats and vianda and sweets. There were *kababs* of venison and capon, grilled partridges and quails, roast duck, mutton, venison and fish curries, potatoes cooked whole after having been soaked in sour milk and laced with spices, turnips and mutton ribs cooked together in an earthen pot for a whole night on slow

fire till meat and vegetable were blended into delicious morsels of dual taste, cauliflower broiled whole and cooked in meat juice till it was soft as pulp, peas, aubergines fried and served with a sauce of spiced curds, a variety of *pilaus,* mutton, chicken, partridge and that king of dishes the rich and succulent *biryani* in which each long and slim grain of rice is filled with the juice of sheep's marrow and the flavour of Kashmir's purest saffron. There were numerous dishes bearing every type of bread and chappati, *parathas* plain and flaky, fried in clarified butter, oven-baked *nans* and *kulchas,* and the princely sapid *baqarkhani* rich with milk, butter and nuts. Of sweet dishes there were more than a dozen, *firni* made of milk and rice flour, rice *kheer,* almond *kheer,* pistachio *kheer,* mango *kheer,* carrot *kheer,* gram *kheer, halvas* made from unsieved flour, semolina, pumpkin, gram pulses, almonds, eggs and mixed nuts. These were followed by savouries, sauces and comfits.

Bahadur Shah confined himself to a few dishes only, but he ate heartily, taking large helpings and eating with unconcealed relish. He began with a plateful of sweet and creamy *firni* to prepare his palate for the quail soup specially prepared by slowly boiling a dozen fatted birds and simmering the broth till there was no more than a cup of rich delicately flavoured nectar containing the taste and nutritious essence of twelve quails. He then ate half a *baqarkhani* with venison *shish kabab* laced with a spoonful of a red-pepper ketchup, prepared according to his special recipe. The *karela halva* invented by him was then brought and proffered. He sent it across to Jawan Bakht and said: "Taste it, son, it is our own invention. See how sweet and delicious a bitter thing can become if handled in the correct manner." The young prince praised the *halva,* and the dish was passed round to the others. "The mouths of these people," said Bahadur Shah, "are my mouth, and their stomachs are my stomach. They eat and I feel happy."

He finished eating, but as was his custom, he continued to sit and nibble a piece of *kabab* till he saw that every one in the room was satisfied. As soon as he withdrew his hand, a group of slave girls hurried forward. One held a copper basin, another a jug of warm water, a third a bowl of gram flour to dissolve grease from his fingers, a fourth a serviette. The King washed his hands, rinsed his mouth, rubbing his teeth and gums with the forefinger of his right hand, and having wiped his hand and mouth, leaned back against his *gao-takia*. He asked Ahmadi Khanum if the ducks from the morning's bag had been sent to the British Agent residing in the Civil Lines area. Having satisfied himself on these matters, he stroked his white beard, shifted himself to recline more comfortably, and enquired about the health of the Heir Apparent, Mirza Dara Bakht, who had been reported to be seriously ill.

Zeenat Mahal said: "When your Majesty was out hunting, news was brought that the *Waliahad* Bahadur's condition had much deteriorated during the night?"

"We are pained to hear this," observed Bahadur Shah, still stroking his beard. "We shall go and personally enquire after his welfare tomorrow morning."

One of the princesses, sitting nearby, said in a low tone: "By tomorrow perhaps, *Waliahad* Sahib..." She left her sentence unfinished and flashed a meaningful glance at Zeenat Mahal.

The estrangement between the king and his eldest son was known to everyone in the Palace. Dara Bakht was only fifteen years younger than his father and looked upon his numerous step-mothers and step-brothers as people belonging to a younger generation and ranking far below him. For Zeenat Mahal he entertained a sentiment bordering on silent contempt. He had limited his attentions to the favourite Queen to the purely formal and obligatory ritual of sending *nazrs* on appropriate occasions. Nor were his offerings over-generous or indicative of brimful emo-

tion. Dara Bakht's illness and the prospect of its proving fatal did not distress the King. Mirza Shah Rookh, second in succession to the throne of Delhi, and died of dysentery while out on a hunting excursion the previous year. So Dara Bakht's illness revived Zeenat Mahal's aspirations. Mirza Fakharuddin, the next eldest son was certainly not a favourite of the king.

Bahadur Shah repeated: "We shall see him tomorrow, on returning from our hunting excursion. We are grieved that the Shahzada's condition has not improved. Ask some one to send Hakim Ahsan Ullah Khan to examine the ailing prince."

The subject was closed for the day, and Bahadur Shah returned to his chamber for his usual afternoon rest.

His declared resolve could not be carried out, for Dara Bakht died quietly in his sleep during the night. The King expressed his grief in appropriate terms and sanctioned the money for the funeral expenses. Later the same day he suggested that a change of air seemed necessary to get rid of a cold Zeenat Mahal had contracted. He added that he was desirous of hunting in the area round Sultan Ghari's mausoleum where the presence of a large gathering of ducks on the nearby lake had been reported. Zeenat Mahal agreed and Mahboob Ali Khan was directed to make the necessary arrangements for a move to Mehrauli.

Two days later, Mahboob Ali Khan reported that all preparations had been completed. The Commandant Palace Guards had been ordered to fire the usual salute of 21 guns and everyone on the route to be followed had been intimated. Bahadur Shah gave orders that his retinue should be in waiting at 4 O'clock the following morning.

All through the cold and frosty night, the ice makers worked, pouring water into their large shallow basins and collecting the crust of ice as soon as it was formed. They hoped to store away more than a

hundred maunds of ice before the sun rose high enough to warm their pits. Bahadur Shah rose at three, and an hour later, was ready to leave. He mounted his elephant, and the long equipage moved towards the Delhi Gate of the Red Fort in a slow procession. The King's dependents, residing along the route, heard the reports of gunfire, and came out to profer *nazrs*. Bahadur Shah noticed that Mirza Humayun Baksh, a near cousin, failed, as on two previous occasions, to present himself. He told Mahboob Ali to note the default and remind him of it on his return.

The King paid the customary homage to his favourite shrine beyond Ajmer Gate and also at the shrine of Qutubuddin Bakhtiar Kaki at Mehrauli. There were a few official papers to dispose of and Bahadur Shah was soon free to be made love to by Zeenat Mahal. As she caressed his lean and wrinkled body, making him alternately shiver with excitement and sigh with satisfaction, she began to importune him, asking him to press for the recognition of Jawan Bakht as Heir Apparent.

"Softly, softly, Begum," the King whispered, "we mustn't be too precipitate. Dara Bakht's death is too recent on event to start agitating about the matter. Ah, closer, closer, hug me tightly. Remember what Hafiz Shiraj said?"

"Yes, my love, yes. I remember. There, is that better? Your Majesty is too soft-hearted. You are misled by appearances. Mirza Fakharuddin is all sweetness and humility before the Refuge of the World, but he is already planning and plotting to have himself declared *Waliahad*. The day after Dara Bakht died, he was absent from the Palace, and I have no doubt at all that he went to see the Agent and represent his case. You must do something. You must, you must."

"But Begum," Bahadur Shah said, "I can't, without any preliminaries, announce that Jawan Bakht has been named *Waliahad*."

"Why not?" Zeenat Mahal had moved away and was searching for her covering. "Why not?" You have the right to do so. Do it. The British Government will have to accept the fact."

Bahadur Shah was tired and sleepy. Zeenat Mahal's persistence was becoming oppressive. He turned over and mumbled "Hum, we shall consult the Hakim, and see what he has to say. Tomorrow, Begum, tomorrow."

Zeenat Mahal made a face and got up. It was early in the afternoon, and leaving Bahadur Shah to recover from her erotic mauling of his increasingly unresponsive body, she sent word to the other Begums and princesses to come and make a round of the royal gardens. The trees were laden with ripe golden oranges. The Begums ran from tree to tree, picking the fruits and tasting them. "Come here," cried one in great excitement. "This tree bears goblets of honey, not oranges." "Oh, this one," shouted another "tastes like the grapes of Kabul." "I like this tree the best," said a third, "I shall have a basketful sent to my room at once." Zeenat Mahal made her slave girl fill a basket of the choicest oranges, as she went round the orchard. Suddenly she exclaimed: "Oof, it is hot in the sun, let us go back." "Yes, yes," the Begums chimed in chorus, "we are tired now. It is time to rest." "I have been up since 3 O'clock," said Zeenat Mahal." I shall go in and sleep."

When she woke up several hours later, her personal female attendant handed her an unripe mango and a petition which had been sent to the King by Mirza Fakharuddin, expressing his sense of deep respect and affection for the King and Queen and assuring them of his everlasting loyalty and filial obedience. Zeenat Mahal thought the unripe mango was a form of challenge, a symbolic threat and a declaration that the time for the fruition of his hopes was not yet ripe. She made a complaint to the King. He laughed at her fears, and said that the mango was only a mark

of his filial regard. It was not yet the season for the mango trees to bear fruit, and Fakharuddin had sent the gift because it was a rare freak of nature. Zeenat Mahal shook her head and pressed upon the King the urgency of pushing forward Jawan Bakht's claim. She sent for Hakim Ahsanullah and spoke to him across a curtain.

"Look," she said, "the post of the *Waliahad* has fallen vacant. The monthly stipend of Rs. 5,000 will be paid only to the recognised incumbent. Mirza Fakhuru knows that His Majesty does not favour him. He will certainly enter into some sort of agreement, giving up some of his future rights to secure present recognition. The time to act is now."

The Hakim stroked his grey beard, nodded his head with sagely deliberation, and said in his slow and soft voice:

"What the Begum Sahiba has uttered is incontestable. As soon as Your Majesty returns to Delhi, I shall draw up a *kharita* and submit it for your pleasure."

The unpleasant subject had been disposed of, and Bahadur Shah allowed his mind to dwell on matters of greater significance. He must go hunting in the morning. He would take Jawan Bakht with him, the lad must learn to sit a horse, and he must be shown the tomb of Sultan Ghari, a lovely structure in marble and stone, one of the oldest monuments in the neighbourhood. He took a piece of paper and began jotting down lines and phrases for a poem which he must read at the next symposium. But he found it difficult to concentrate. He began thinking of Ghalib and his sharp, stinging verses. He wished he could write like that, draw out the quintessence of emotion in a few words, with a whiplash at the end of each couplet which left you groaning with ecstacy. It was not always easy to follow the trend of his thought, and you had to be all ears while listening to him, but when you read over what he had recited and repeated it a

dozen times, you know that there was no poet to equal him. Zauq, in comparison, had only occasional flashes of brilliance, and even then, there was little depth in his compositions. Ah, but then Ghalib had suffered: he had experienced pain, deep down in the very roots of his being: he had known love and its fulfilment and also the pangs of deprivation. Not many had heard the story of his grand passion. They looked upon him as a bibulous rake who sought an escape from the irritations and frustrations of his domestic life in bottles of French red wine. He made no secret of the fact that his childless wife was an all but insufferable burden which he had been sentenced to carry. Deep down inside his soul, he had feelings, tender and intense. He could conjure up an image of blissful euphoria as well as of utter misery with an economy of words that staggered the comprehension. He could squeeze a tearful song out of simple monosyllabic words that seemed spontaneously to fall into short rhythmic measures, or weave an entire philosophy into a scintillating pattern with a haunting lilt.

He began composing lines in the simple metre of one of Ghalib's ghazals. When he had written down three couplets he abandoned the task. The lines were trite and poorly formed:

I cannot write what my heart has to say
And what I write I have not the heart to read.
When my tongue pronounces thy name
The delicious taste lingers on my tongue.

No, no, said Bahadur Shah to himself. What was the use of making up such commonplace jingles? He put away his writing materials, and began pacing up and down the floor of his chamber. It was much more rewarding to read Sa'adi or Hafiz of Shiraz.

Mahboob Ali Khan came and said that in obedience to the King's command, a dozen baskets of oranges had been packed and brought to the Palace. Bahadur Shah ordered that two thousand of the best and sweetest fruit be despatched to the Agent who was

reported to have come to Qutab with some foreign visitors.

The journey back to Delhi, a few days later, was performed with the same ceremony and display of royal splendour. Bahadur Shah rode his richly caparisoned elephant. Zeenat Mahal followed in a gaily decorated canopy, mounted on a female elephant. The usual retinue of camels, cavalrymen and footmen augmented by spectators made up a long and noisy procession. Outside the city gate, Mirza Fakharuddin, accompanied by his attendants, received the king, and after paying his respects, joined the procession. Bahadur Shah was greatly pleased by this act of courtesy and asked himself why Jawan Bakht could not learn the courtly manners of a prince.

Mahboob Ali Shah begged the King to proceed straight to the *Diwan-i-Khas* as a number of urgent matters awaited his consideration, and the officials were in attendance, ready to hear His Majesty's commands. Bahadur Shah was put out by this unusual request, but agreed to forego his rest hour before taking up the day's official business. The appearance of the Hall of Special Audience increased his irritation. The place had not been cleaned, the floor was littered with scraps of dirty cloth, ashes, burnt charcoal, and remnants of food. There was an old charpoy lying in one corner. The inlaid marble walls were soiled with marks of spittle and dirt. He began to upbraid Mahboob Ali Khan.

"Why isn't this place cleaned? Is it here that Shahjahan sat on the Peacock Throne and held his court? Is this the Paradise on Earth? We shall not grant audience to anyone in such a monument of sloth and slovenliness."

Mahboob Ali Khan bowed low, presenting his head on both his palms. The moan of a wounded animal reached the King's ears:

"Refuge of the World, Your Majesty's commands are dearer to me than life, but what can your slave do? Your Majesty's staff bearers have been quartered here. They have nowhere else to go. They have soiled the hall. If Your Majesty would condescend to assign some other place for their residence, the royal commands will be executed with the utmost diligence and despatch. I have sent for the sweepers and they are coming. Will Your Majesty be pleased to sit on the terrace, and hear the petitions?"

Bahadur Shah remained silent as he took his seat on a wooden diwan which the attendants hastily brought and covered with a cloth of faded red silk. Mahboob Ali Shah raised his eyes from the contemplation of his palms. "May I draw Your Majesty's attention to this item in the newspaper? There is a beautiful young lady possessed of great wealth, desirous of marrying Your Majesty." Bahadur Shah looked up and saw a twinkle in the eunuch's eyes, as he proferred a folded sheet of printed paper. Bahadur Shah laughed: "Send Mirza Nooruddin to enquire who the lady is. I suspect this is somebody playing a joke."

Khaliq Dad Wilayati, a Pathan attendant attached to the *toshakhana,* suddenly stepped forward, and proffered two bottles, thrusting them under the King's nose.

"What does the fellow mean?" shouted Bahadur Shah in anger.

Khaliq Dad pleaded: "Refuge of the World, I present these bottles containing the finest essence of *bed mushk* which I have purchased for forty rupees. Honour me by accepting them and ordering the accountant to reimburse me."

"Forty rupees!" screamed Bahadur Shah. "This is an outrageous price. I do not need the essence." He turned to Mahboob Ali Khan: "Tell the rascal to take the bottles away."

The Pathan attendant was stung to the quick.

He drew back his hand, and standing where he was in front of the King, uncorked one of the bottles, put it to his mouth and swallowed the contents. He did the same with the second bottle, and tossing the empties away over his shoulder, turned on his heels and walked away. The bottles fell on the paved terrace and splintered noisily. There was a long moment of silence before Bahadur Shah's wrath exploded in a shrill high-pitched invective.

"Wilayati, you son of a dog, you seed of an ill-famed procurer, come here, you defiler of the salt you have eaten. Bring him here, someone, and present him before us."

Two attendants ran and dragged Wilayati back. They held him pinioned in front of Bahadur Shah.

"What do you mean by this impertinence?" demanded the King.

"Your Majesty may deduct forty rupees from my salary and pay the merchant from whom I obtained the bottles of *bed mushk.*"

Bahadur Shah ignored this, and ordered that the man be given fifty lashes and then brought before him to express his repentance and ask for pardon. Mahboob Ali Khan whispered in the King's ear. "*Hazur*, I pray that the punishment of whipping be not inflicted. It will be sufficient to discharge him from Your Majesty's service." "No, no," Bahadur Shah insisted, "he must be given fifty lashes; he must be taught a lesson. We must have a report by this evening that our orders have been carried out." Mahboob Ali Khan bowed in acknowledgement and told Wilayati's captors to take him away and keep him in custody.

Mahboob Ali Khan now turned to the business set down for the day. "Your Majesty", he began, "before Hakim Ahsanullah Khan brings to your notice a distressing event which occurred in the Palace during Your Majesty's absence at Qutab, I have to report the loss of a large cauldron weighing 18 maunds. It had been placed near the *Diwan-i-Khas* after the last Id

festival, and no trace of it can be found. Enquiries are being made."

"Whose work is this?" asked Bahadur Shah with almost childish petulance. "How many reports of the loss of royal property do I receive every month! Enquiries are made and there is no result. There are 400 servants in my service, but what do they do? I never see them at their posts or performing their duties. Mahboob Ali Khan, you really must exercise greater vigilance and deal more strictly with defaulters and miscreants."

"Refuge of the World, the offenders will be punished and the cost of the cauldron will be recovered from their salaries."

"Very well. We wish to receive a complete report within a week."

Mahboob Ali Khan approached nearer and lowering his voice to almost a whisper, reminded the King that Mirza Humayun Bakht had, on several occasions, failed to pay his respects to His Majesty or present the usual *nazr*. Bahadur Shah nodded and asked that the *darban*, the gatekeeper, be summoned before him. As soon as the *darban* had made his obeisance, he said:

"Go immediately to Mirza Humayun Bakht, and convey to him our displeasure at his persistent failure to appear before us and pay his respects whenever we have passed by his residence. Tell him further that, at the present time, we are in need of a Turkish and an Arab horse and the prince must wait on us with these horses without delay."

There was a moment's silence, and then Hakim Ahsanullah Khan stepped forward, solemn and grey-bearded, holding a bundle of papers and wearing a grim expression on his aged face.

"Presence, a most tragic event came to pass in the Palace two days after Your Majesty left for Qutab. Nanoo, a groom in the service of Mirza Mohammed Baksh, *salateen*, was reported to have run away after stealing some of his master's property. His surety,

Mansa groom, also in the employ of the Mirza, was told to produce the absconder, or else a sum of Rs. 50 would be deducted from his salary at the expiration of sixty days. Mansa accordingly brought Nanoo and presented him before the Mirza who was so enraged at his groom's misconduct that he gave him a merciless flogging and threw him into a dungeon. A short while later, Nanoo expressed a desire to go out to answer the call of nature. Leaving his prison cell on this pretext, he jumped into a well and was drowned."

Ahsanullah paused. He took out a sheet from a bundle of papers and placed it on top. He continued:

"As soon as I was informed of this mishap, I ordered the Mufti and the Nazir to summon everyone who knew anything of the circumstances and record their statements. Nanoo's body was taken out of the well and carried to the police station. The flogging had been so severe that the flesh on the unfortunate victim's body was badly lacerated. The witnesses were unanimous in stating that fear of a repetition of the punishment at the hands of his master had driven Nanoo to commit suicide. The Nazir and the Mufti of Your Majesty's Civil Court, have directed the Mirza to furnish security in the amount of Rs. 2,000. The matter now awaits Your Majesty's commands."

Bahadur Shah ordered that Mirza Mohammed Baksh must furnish this security, and the bond must be presented before him the same day.

The Hakim presented two petitions from aspirants for service in the Palace, mentioning the *nazrana* which the candidates were willing to pay on securing appointment. The King referred these to the heads of the relevant departments, and then indicated that he was desirous of returning to his chamber. Ahsanullah Khan announced that His Majesty's durbar was closed for the day and the King rose from his seat.

While walking with the King to the residential part of the Palace, Ahsanullah adverted to the subject of the punishment awarded to Wilayati. He pointed

out that reports of Nanoo's unfortunate suicide had reached the ears of the Agent, and another misadventure of the same sort might give rise to repercussions of an unsavoury variety. It was unfortunate that minions in the service of the King were nowadays tutored by *Iblees* and displayed the most lamentable ingratitude for the benefits accruing from royal munificence. Wilayati was undoubtedly an incorrigible offspring of Satan, and it might be more in consonance with His Majesty's dignity and his famed large-heartedness if he remitted the sentence of flogging, and gave one more proof of his clemency by merely discharging the offender from his service. Bahadur Shah told the Hakim that he had already reconsidered the matter and come to the same conclusion himself, and his previous orders were to be amended accordingly.

Hardly had the King entered his chamber when a slave girl craved leave to say that Zeenat Mahal Begum wished to talk to His Majesty. Almost at once, Zeenat Mahal burst into the room in a state of great agitation.

"I have been waiting for Your Majesty for hours," she exclaimed. "I thought you were never coming. You should have more regard for your wife."

Bahadur Shah was all concern and anxiety. "Why, Begum wished to talk to His Majesty. Almost at once, "what has happened?"

"What has not happened? You are so taken up with your hunting and your poems and your royal duties that you have no time to redress the wrongs of your unhappy Queen."

Zeenat Mahal was angry, passion flamed from her eyes and nostrils, and she was on the verge of tears.

"But, tell me what is the matter, Begum," pleaded Bahadur Shah.

"What is the matter? Why, I have been insulted,

humiliated, mortified, and Your Majesty knows nothing about it. Since when has your self-declared and self-appointed Heir Apparent acquired the right to inflict indignities on your consort? Am I not the Queen and must I not be accorded the respect due to my status?"

The King was bewildered. What had Fakharuddin done now, and in what manner had he offended the Queen so deeply? Once again, he begged the Queen to enlighten him on the cause of her wrath. Finally, she told her story. Mirza Fakharuddin, after greeting the King at the City Gate, had joined the royal procession, but against all canons of filial obligation and Palace etiquette, courtesy and protocol, he had had his elephant placed in advance of the Queen's canopy. "The prince is, as yet, far from being recognised as Your Majesty's Heir Apparent. His conduct was deliberately designed to belittle me. The whole world saw him riding in front of my equipage. I could see through the curtains that the eyes of everyone were turned towards my canopy. I could have died of shame at being treated so... so... *Hai* Allah, why did not I die?" Bringing her histrionic performance to a climax, Zeenat Mahal dissolved into tears.

Bahadur Shah was relieved and amazed. He tried to hedge, and said that he had noticed nothing amiss. He had been at the head of the procession and the incident must have escaped him. Zeenat Mahal refused to be appeased, and repeated her charge. She appealed to the King to make enquiries from the Commandant of the Palace Guards who had also gone out to receive His Majesty and had also joined the procession at the same spot as the prince. He had undoubtedly observed Fakharuddin's arrogant behaviour. The King sent for the Commandant and questioned him on the point. The Commandant said he had observed nothing unusual or untoward. Bahadur Shah was in a dilemma. He was unwilling to reprimand the Prince, nor could he disregard the Begum's complaint. After a little thought, he sent for the mahout

of Fakharuddin's elephant and discharged him from service. The mahout went post-haste to the Hakim and begged him to intercede. Happily, a way was found to circumvent the royal wrath and retract the harsh order. When the memory of the disagreeable episode had been somewhat blurred by the passage of two days, the mahout sought royal audience and presented a *nazr* of Rs. 300. He presented another *nazr* of the like amount to the Queen. He was promptly pardoned and restored to his post. In addition, he was favoured by the bestowal of a *khillat.*

Once again, Zeenat Mahal importuned the King to press Jawan Bakht's claim for recognition as Heir Apparent. The reluctance of the Commandant to say anything detrimental to Fakharuddin was a clear indication of British bias. Fakharuddin was, no doubt, taking steps to ingratiate himself with British offiicals, and unless the King moved in the matter at once, Jawan Bakht would lose his case by default. Urged in this manner, Bahadur Shah gave instructions to Hakim Ahsanullah to prepare a *kharita* addressed to the Lieutenant-Governor of the North West Province. The next day, the following letter scribed on special Court paper and rolled up in a piece of rich, red brocade tied with a silk-tasselled cord, was sent by special messenger to the Agent at Delhi with a covering note requesting its immediate despatch to his superior.

"My Most Honourable Friend,

God Almighty has placed everything in the hands of the authorities whom it has pleased Him to appoint for the protection and comfort of His people. That Your Honour's high character of justice and impartiality are highly famed and that under the conviction that Your Honour is always willing to protect and maintain the royal dignity of this house, I have the pleasure to forward for your most impartial consideration and orders, the following circumstances. That the Heir Apparent to the Royal throne, the late Mirza Dara

Bakht has demised, and it has, therefore, become necessary to place another son of mine in his room to continue the name of this house. The late Heir Apparent acted always at variance with my feelings, and I had cause to be displeased with him: and among my other sons, no one appears to me so fit to occupy this office as Mirza Mohammed Jawan Bakht Bahadur who, I am glad to say, is endowed with natural good propensities. He has not yet attained the age of maturity and has not been allowed to mix with people who are not upright. Besides, he is from my loyal wife who is of a very high family, viz., Nawab Zeenat Mahal, daughter of Shamsud Daulah Ahmed Quli Khan who is a son of Abbas Quli Khan who was the son of a *Wazir*. The said Mirza is naturally of a mild, good disposition. Under these circumstances therefore, he is best suited for the high office of Heir Apparent and since he always remains under my eyes and devotes all his time to learning in different branches of education, I feel satisfied that he will never do anything contrary to my wish."

The *kharita* worded in Persian was read over and explained to Zeenat Mahal. She expressed satisfaction with its contents.

When Fakharuddin received information of these proceedings he was stung to the quick. He thought over the matter for a few days and then addressed a letter to the Agent in which he recounted at great length, his talents and virtues. "I am a cultured prince, possessed of learning and maturity," he said. "I have compiled a history of all the Kings and prophets from the time of Mohammed to the present day. I propose to have the book printed for circulation to my European friends. A volume of my poems has won admiration from my friends and dependants. Until the arrival of the intriguing Zeenat Mahal Begum, the King reposed entire confidence in me, and upheld

my dignity with mark of every possible distinction. Jawan Bakht is ninth in the order of succession. He is son of the daughter of Ahmed Quli Khan, a descendant of a coolie family, for her grandfather, Abbas Quli Khan, was a slave of the Prince of Kabul. The term Quli or Coolie is the significant distinction of a bondman." He concluded by making a fervent appeal for his own recognition as *Waliahad* and the rejection of Jawan Bakht's claim.

Lord Dalhousie read Fakharuddin's letter and recorded a brief minute: "We are bound by no tradition or argument of any kind to concede anything whether of powers, title or revenue, to the family of Timur. There is no longer any reason of policy for maintaining the dynasty even in name. It is not expedient that there should be even in name, a rival in the person of a sovereign whose ancestors once held the paramountcy we are now possessed of. I, therefore, decline to recognise Fakharuddin as Heir Apparent."

CHAPTER TEN

BAHADUR SHAH sat in front of a silver-framed looking-glass which a foreign visitor had brought as a gift some years previously. The face he saw was old and wrinkled. There were deep furrows across his forehead, and two long trenches on either side of his nose cut across the lower part of his face. His beard and moustache had lost their bright silvery lustre and acquired a new quality of ashy lifelessness. He felt tired and unhappy. The morning's hunting expedition had exhausted him. The chase had not yielded anything, and for the first time in many months, he had returned to the Palace empty-handed. Old age had at last taken possession of him, and there was nothing he could do about it. All the hopes and schemes which had crowded his brain twelve years ago as he stood contemplating the dead body of his father lying prostrate had come to nought. He was a failure, an utter failure. Allah was not on his side and did not consider him worthy of His favour. All round him the old glory of the Mughal Empire lay shattered in ugly ruins. The chamber he sat in had not been swept or dusted, the divan-covering was soiled, the carpet was dirty and worn thin, a rat had nibbled a hole in one corner, the curtain over the door had grease marks, a patch of garden visible through the window on his left revealed an unkempt appearance. His servants no longer worked or paid serious attention to his wishes. His wives and concubines openly ignored him. Even Zeenat Mahal was more concerned with her own status and the powers she could wield, then what pleased him as

her husband and King.

Suddenly he was overwhelmed with self pity. He felt a lump rising in his throat and two tears gathered and trickled down his cheek. He made no attempt to control himself and allowed his swelling emotion to take complete possession of him. The change in Zeenat Mahal was the most mortifying blow of all. A fortnight ago she had pressed him to pay a visit to her personal home in Lal Kua and stay there as her guest. He had had the house built for her and had composed the Persian epigram indicating the year of its construction, 1262 Hijra.

O Zafar, Zeenat Mahal has built her incomparable palace.

The date is on the palace. *This the house of Zeenat Mahal**. He had agreed and Zeenat Mahal had begun making preparations to receive and entertain him in grand style. With the help of Mahboob Ali Khan, she had taken away several cart-loads of carpets, furnishings, utensils and linen from the palace *toshakhana*. He had watched this depletion of royal property in silence. On the appointed day, Zeenat Mahal drove out of the Red Fort in her heavily curtained carriage drawn by eight horses. Two liveried grooms sat in front and two followed behind on foot. The equipage was headed by drummers beating a continuous tattoo and announcing that Her Exalted Majesty the Queen Nawab Zeenat Mahal Begum was proceeding from the Palace in the Exalted Fort to her palace in Lal Kua in order to receive His Majesty the King. A crier called upon everyone to mind his step and maintain a respectful regard. No wonder Zeenat Mahal had acquired

*Each letter of the alphabet has a specific numerical value, and adding up the number represented by the letters in the phrase **In Khana-i-Zeenat Mahal** (this the house of Zeenat Mahal) the figure 1262 is obtained. This was a well-recognised mode of recording the dates of important events. Bahadur Shah's skill in constructing such epigrammatic dates was well-known.

the sobriquet of Danka Begum, the drum beating Queen, for her outings were marked by greater fuss and noise than even the King's entrances and exits. After her uproarious passage, his own drive along Chandni Chowk had seemed tame and unobstrusive. The cortege accompanying his carriage, drawn by sixteen horses, had made less noise and taken less time to reach Lal Kua, so that he arrived at her house before she had gathered her friends and relations to go out to receive the royal party. From then on it had been clear to Bahadur Shah that the object of inviting him was not to do honour to him, but to advertise and flaunt her own importance and the power she exercised. It had been a bitter realisation and a frustrating experience, made worse by a newspaper report that a sum of Rs. 20,000 had been spent on entertaining him. "Great is Allah," the *Khulasa Akhbar* said, "for whosoever is desirous of inviting the King must spend Rs. 1,500 a day. Truly the King is reduced to the level of a subject."

This was not the only piece of malicious gossip about the happenings in the royal household. Every day he heard things that galled and humiliated him. Hakim Ahsanullah Khan daily complained about the rising burden of royal debts. The merchants of the city were clamouring for payment and were no longer willing to advance further loans. Money was needed by Zeenat Mahal. A handsome gift of at least Rs. 5,000 must be given on the occasion of the marriage of Mian Kale Sahib's son. Mian Kale Sahib, the great divine, was obviously angry with him, he had not favoured him by paying his periodic call for many months now. Did he not realise that even a holy man must show regard for the Sovereign, for just as spiritual wealth flowed from his person, he, Bahadur Shah was the source of material wealth. But what was the worth and quantum of his Kingly wealth, and what was the measure of his dignity and power? Only yesterday the son of the Chief of Kanpur had slighted him by refusing to remove his tall *kalghi*, panache, from his tur-

ban before entering the royal presence and had preferred to go away without paying his respects. Piqued by the young nawab's refractory behaviour Bahadur Shah had declined to receive the Commandant of the Palace Guards when he sent a message that he was desirous of waiting upon His Majesty, and sent back the reply that the king was occupied with important matters. But this retaliatory measure only intensified his state of helpless sorrow.

Yes, he was old and helpless. Nobody wanted him, nobody honoured or respected him, nobody feared him. He was no longer a sovereign. Only in name was he King. His vigour and manhood had seeped out of him leaving him weak and puny and the laughing stock of even those who had been near and dear to him. A flood of tears poured out of his eyes. The face in the mirror before him became blurred. His body was shaken by audible sobs.

Why had Allah not deemed him worthy and denied him His favours? His kingly pride was now smothered in dust. His wives and concubines ignored and defied him. Worst of all was the recent behaviour of Taj Mahal Begum, half sister of Zeenat Mahal. She was a pert and saucy little girl, barely thirteen, but beautiful and possessed of a most promising figure. His eyes had fastened on her small pointed breasts only half concealed by a close fitting shirt of transparent silk. When she walked, not with slow languid steps as did her elder sister, but with a quick, tripping movement, the small rounded bulges of her girlish buttocks sent his desire flying to a not too distant future. Two years later, he had married her, but Taj Mahal Begum was wanting in her elder sister's sense of propriety and restraint. She was without any ambition and sought only the joy she could extract from the present moment. She had no desire to supplant Zeenat Mahal in the place of affection and power which she had secured for herself. But also she did not want her youth to wither and die merely because

she had been chosen to enter the harem of an old and shrivelled King. She wanted money, clothes, ornaments, slave girls to wait upon her and run to do her bidding, and most of all she wanted to feel the hard and hurtful embrace of a young man. The restrictions imposed by palace decorum galled her and made her restless spirit rebel.

With the help of Bilal Khan, a negro eunuch, she began taking loans from enterprising money-lenders. This conspiratorial intimacy made the negro assume an offensively familiar attitude which Taj Mahal resented. She complained to Bahadur Shah and demanded the peremptory dismissal of Bilal Khan. The negro declined to leave till he was repaid the loans he had raised. Taj Mahal shouted at him: "You are a wicked and deceitful man, as black inside as outside." She swore she would have the negro flogged till the skin peeled off his black body. She told the King she would go on a fast till Bilal Khan quitted the Palace. She became hysterical in her demand for the negro's dismissal.

Bahadur Shah sent for the enunch and ordered him to leave the Palace. Bilal was adamant. He must, he said, be paid Rs. 15,000 to discharge his liability to the merchants, otherwise he would commit suicide. He shouted and called upon Allah to be his judge, for Taj Mahal Begum had done him gross injustice and even the King was denying him his rightful dues. A crowd collected in front of the royal apartments, and *salateens*, attendants and Bahadur Shah's personal armed guard watched the negro's histrionics.

"Leave the Palace immediately," shouted the enraged King in his high pitched voice. Bilal ran from the spot screaming that he was going to kill himself and there was no justice in the King's court. Husain Mirza, Nazir, followed him with two armed attendants and took possession of all arms found in the eunuch's living quarter. Bahadur Shah sent four of his orderlies to seize the miscreant and eject him from the Palace.

He gave directions to the Commandant of the Guards to prevent the eunuch from making a disturbance in the neighbourhood. Bilal left the Palace shouting, "May my going away do all the good to Taj Mahal Begum that she has been hoping for and dreaming of."

Taj Mahal now conducted herself as if Bilal's parting imprecation had been a challenge. Two days later she announced that she was going to pay a visit to her father in the city, and left the Palace. Reports of her carryings-on were brought to the King and he sent a *darban* to fetch her. The *darban* questioned the eunuch posted at the outer door of her father's house. "I am always here," the eunuch stated, "and I have never seen any unauthorised person leave the house. There is no other door, and I swear nothing improper happens inside." Taj Mahal declined to accompany the *darban*. Bahadur Shah sent her own accountant, Baldev Singh to persuade her to come back. She sent him packing about his business. The King sent the *darban* a second time. Taj Mahal shut herself up inside the house, and sent a message through a slave-girl that His Majesty should make an investigation into her conduct, and punish her accusers on proof of her innocence. Messages went back and forth between the Palace and Taj Mahal's house in the city. Bahadur Shah declared the Begum was flouting his authority, and sent Mahboob Ali Khan to bring her back, and to post sentries at her door till she was willing to return. Taj Mahal shouted and screamed in high anger, "what is the matter with His Majesty? He permitted me to reside in the city, and now he is caluminating my character, because he lends a credulous ear to gossip and to the poisonous back-biting of other begums."

Mahboob Ali repeated the begum's message. The King promptly ordered him to tell Taj Mahal that in her own interest she should return. "If she still persists in obstinacy," he added, "bring her back by whatever means are available, and don't hesitate to use force." Pushed to the extreme limit, Taj Mahal came sulking

back to the Palace, but she shut herself up in her room and refused to see the King. A slave girl told the King that the begum had sent her portrait to the *Wazir* of Lucknow, and was sending surreptitious letters to him. "And, Refuge of the World," the informant whispered, "Mirza Mohammed Shah visits her secretly at night."

Bahadur Shah exploded with wrath. Mirza Mohammed Shah was his own son-in-law, the husband of his daughter Piari Begum. "Call Piari Begum here at once," he shouted.

The moment Piari Begum appeared in the door, he lashed out at her, in the shrill squeaky voice of his high anger, "Can you not make your husband behave? May the scourge of Allah fall upon you, that being our daughter, the product of our seed, you have permitted your husband to sin with one of our begums."

Piari Begum protested that the King was misinformed, and the stories about Taj Mahal and Mirza Mohammed Shah were false. "No, no," shouted the King, "we know what is happening in this dung-hole of iniquity. You are only trying to shield your husband. Beware Piari Begum, the wrath of Allah will descend upon you and upon your sinful husband."

Bahadur Shah reduced Taj Mahal's personal allowance to Rs. 200 a month and withdrew the servants assigned to her. Taj Mahal begged to appear in person before the King and plead her cause. Bahadur Shah rejected her prayer. A few days later, Taj Mahal's brother and mother waited upon the King and submitted that her enemies had fabricated venomous reports against her. "If Your Majesty," they pleaded, "finds the smallest grain of proof, we swear we shall ourselves put her to death, and make her pay for her misdeeds. But how can the tongues of tattlers be silenced. We beseech Your Majesty to have pity on her."

Bahadur Shah resisted the appeals for some time, but when further pressed and beseeched by Taj Mahal and Zeenat Mahal and by Hakim Ahsanullah Khan, he

finally yielded. Taj Mahal presented him with a *nazr* and gave an elaborate entertainment at which the best singing and dancing girls of the city performed and the head-cook of the King's kitchen served the most exquisitely prepared dishes.

For the time being Bahadur Shah was placated, but the episode had left a foul taste in his mouth, and had furnished one more proof of his weak and vacillating mind, and of his utter helplessness in administering his affairs. The memory of Taj Mahal's open defiance of his authority and his ultimate acceptance of her simulated penitence added to his suffering and self-condemnation. His past, present and future appeared dark and devoid of hope.

And then suddenly he saw light. He resolved to make an appeal to God through his preceptor Mian Kale Sahib. Humility and penance were the means of approaching the Almighty—not the pride of royalty and the exaltation of power. He repeated the *maqta*—the last couplet of one of his ghazals:

O Zafar, do not deem him man, howsoever endowed with wisdom and craft,
Who remembers not God in his hour of abundance, who fears not God in his moment of passion.

He summoned Hakim Ahsanullah Khan and told him that he must immediately go to Mian Kale Sahib and beg his forgiveness like a truly penitent sinner. The royal elephant was sent for, and accompanied by the Hakim, Bahadur Shah went to the divine's *haveli* in Kasim Jan Lane. At the gate he dismounted, and handing his silk scarf to the Hakim said: "Tie my hands together." The Hakim did as he was told. One of the Kale Sahib's sons, aged five, came out into the lane and began telling the King that a group of Sikhs had come to visit his father, and had made an offering of a large quantity of gold sovereigns. "There is a heap of them lying in the room inside" he added confidingly and went skipping away to look for his playmates.

Bahadur Shah stood stunned for a moment, and

then sent the Hakim in with the message: "Abu Zafar is present. If you command, he will present himself before you."

Promptly came the reply that the King could enter at his pleasure.

Bahadur Shah stood before the divine with his hands tied together in front of him. He bowed his head and recited a Persian couplet.

Your slave has presented himself before you,
His honour brought low by the weight of his own sin.

Tears poured out of his eyes in a continuous stream flowing down his beard and wetting his tunic. Kale Sahib rose from his seat, undid the knot which held the King's hands and embraced him.

Calming down, Bahadur Shah spoke: "Presence, I invoke you in the name of your ancestor to pardon my offence."

"I forgive you", Kale Sahib replied, "and I pray that Allah may pardon my trespasses as well as yours." Then after a moment's pause, he looked into Bahadur Shah's eyes long and intently. "Abu Zafar", he said at last, "did you really believe that I and my family are dependent on the munificence of the Red Fort? This is only a figment of your brain, an error which has misled you. When I went to pay homage at the holy shrine of Taunsa, I was granted the boon of never wanting for anything I needed. Now, I merely shut my eyes and wish, and my wish is immediately granted. I am thus able to enjoy to the full all the pleasures of this world, as well as of Paradise. No one now brings me a silver coin, every devotee that comes makes an offering of gold."

Kale Sahib made a sign to his servant. The man opened the door of a room, and Bahadur Shah saw a heap of gleaming scintillating gold sovereigns.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

ONE DAY when Hakim Ahsanullah entered the King's private office for his customary audience to present routine papers, discuss Palace affairs and obtain the King's orders in matters needing his personal attention, he looked more than usually solemn. It was a cold day in late December, and the sky outside was overcast with dark grey clouds threatening rain. Bahadur Shah had wrapped himself in a white *pashmina* shawl, and with his legs folded under the ample skirt of his woollen *choga*, sat warming his hands at a large brazier full of glowing charcoals. He looked up at the Hakim and said: "It is cold today. Also I feel it more now in my old age."

The Hakim merely said: "Refuge of the World," in a strangely hushed voice, and sitting down, began to study the sheaf of papers he had brought with him.

"You are perturbed about something", Bahadur Shah remarked. "Is everything well with you?"

"I live in the shadow of Your Majesty's generous sentiments". He paused and slowly placed a sheet of paper on the table before the King. "This, Refuge of the World, is a letter from the Agent asking for a complete list of Your Majesty's sons now living. He also seeks information about their ages and the details of their...their...the names of the respective Begums who have given birth to them."

"This is an outrage," exclaimed the King. "What right has he? What business is it of his?"

Ahsanullah lowered his eyes to the table and explained. Speaking slowly in a soft voice he said that

the Lieutenant Governor had very carefully read and considered the contents of the King's *kharita* and his request for the recognition of Mirza Jawan Bakht as Heir Apparent. He had asked the Agent to get complete information regarding the royal princes, and the Agent had deemed it more courteous to appeal to His Majesty himself to give the details required.

Bahadur Shah was not appeased. "What insolence, what impertinence!" he shouted in his high pitched tone of anger. "Now these people have the daring, the audacity to question me about the Begums. Time was when such folly would have cost a man his head. Tell the Agent the King rejects his petition and declines to answer it."

Ahsanullah was quiet for a few moments, and then began to soothe the old man and reason with him. Patience, restraint, dignified calm, these were virtues most essential in a King. Nothing could be gained and everything might be lost by a display of temper. The British had their own peculiar notions of justice and rules of inheritance. They must be persuaded and not dictated to. They were like the irate monkey in the fable who destroyed the weaver-bird's nest because the weaver-bird advised him to be more provident and not remain homeless. Their power was increasing every day and creeping into new lands. They could ... they could ... they could do a great deal.

Bahadur Shah sighed. It was a slow and deep sigh and gave relief to his sorrow and despair. He read the paper in front of him and looked up at Ahsanullah with his large eyes which despite the bunches of wrinkles framing them had retained the brightness and attraction of his youthful days. Ahsanullah took another sheet from the bundle in his hand and laid it before the King.

"I have prepared a provisional statement for Your Majesty's consideration".

Bahadur Shah scanned the paper. There were thirteen names in the Hakim's list, thirteen princes of

royal blood born of his seed and mothered by eleven women. Fakharuddin, the most dangerous rival of Jawan Bakht, was the eldest, and Jawan Bakht was shown at number 9. Only two of his sons could truly speaking, be said to be legitimate, Jawan Bakht and Mirza Mughal whose mother like Zeenat Mahal was a lady of noble birth and whom Bahadur Shah had married in the formal customary manner. He continued to study the list, running his eyes up and down the page and moving his lips to form the various names, while the Hakim sat watching in patient silence.

"Give me paper and pencil," he said at last.

Bahadur Shah wrote the name of Jawan Bakht at the top of the page, and added "from the belly of Nawab Zeenat Mahal Begum, a lady of noble birth, the King's lawfully wedded wife". The second name he wrote was Mohammed Zaheeruddin, known as Mirza Mughal, born of Sharafat Mahal Begum. He wrote nine more names, nine princes born of the various singing girls and slave girls, Moti Bai, Khyum Bai, Rajan Khawas, names he had forgotten and had scarcely associated with the motherhood of his sons. He had heard their song or seen them dance, and embraced their young exciting bodies for a night or two. There were many such who had entered his harem, and after a short nuptial play had been supplanted by others, and all but forgotten. Once or twice he had summoned to his bed a woman whose responses had been vigorous enough to linger in his memory, but for the most part his concubines and *khawases*, the maid servants, had made no lasting impact on him, and he certainly did not look upon them as queens. He had treated their children as his own offspring but he had the right to name any one of them as his heir and successor. No one could dispute Jawan Bakht's claim and certainly not Fakharuddin whose mother was a low born woman, a sayyadani. The last two names he wrote down were Fakharuddin and Khizr Sultan "born of Rahim Baksh Bai, a sayyadani concubine."

Bahadur Shah handed the sheet to the Hakim and told him to prepare his reply to the Agent's query according to the list of the royal princes which he had now written down.

Days, weeks and months went by. Came spring and the scorching *loo*, of May and June. Bahadur Shah was seventy-six. He felt feebler and frailer than before. His customary hunting excursion no longer gave him a sense of achievement and exhilaration. An hour's strenuous ride on his Arab fatigued him, but a habit cultivated over the years drew him to his favourite haunts where he hunted or practised shooting arrows. The caresses of his concubines and slave girls had ceased to arouse him. He felt only a tantalising constriction, a painful congestion in the lower part of his abdomen. He still relished a rich *biryani* with fried quails or a crisp delicately broiled *kabab*, but a dietary indiscretion resulted in diarrhoea or fever which brought forth loud complaints and repeated summons for Hakim Ahsanullah Khan. The Hakim administered his digestive medicines, and his remonstrances, but the King was incorrigible. Scarcely had he recovered from his ailment when he would indulge in further excesses and be obliged to take to bed again. The wrangle over the choice of the Heir Apparent had become an open secret and was a matter of frequent gossip among the residents of the Palace. Mirza Fakharuddin did not now trouble to conceal his complete lack of filial regard and affection, and was often openly disrespectful and even hostile to the King. He failed to present himself at the Id Durbar. His absence was noted by the King and sending for the prince, he demanded an explanation for such reprehensible conduct.

"I was under the impression," pleaded the prince, "that Your Majesty was inside the *mahal*, and I was not informed that a durbar was being held."

"Why did you not," retorted the King, "come to the

mahal to pay your respects, and offer felicitation for Id as a well-behaved and obedient son?"

Fakharuddin felt the eyes of the attendants and courtiers stabbing him from all sides. He craved the King's forgiveness and offered the Id *nazr*. He also presented an English made hand-fan as an additional mark of his affection for the King.

Two days later when the Agent paid one of his routine calls, he told Bahadur Shah that he had received a distressing report from a reliable source in the Palace. Some of the Crown Jewels and other valuable articles were said to have been removed from the *toshakhana* by Zeenat Mahal Begum with the complicity of Mahboob Ali Khan. The Agent hoped his information was erroneous or, at least exaggerated. When Bahadur Shah spoke of the matter to Zeenat Mahal later in the day, the Queen burst out with a vehement denial and charged Mirza Fakharuddin with making a false and venomous report. "Tell the Agent", she shouted "to count the jewels and tally them with the official list. As Allah is present before me, Fakharuddin in caluminating me".

The King sent for Fakharuddin and began to scream and heap invectives upon him: "You are a thief, a miscreant, an incorrigible mischiefmonger, a good-for-nothing wastrel. But what else could be expected from the offspring of a woman who is a low born slut..."

Fakharuddin stood silent till the King had finished. He then said he was completely innocent. He had made no report to the Agent, and His Majesty was doing a gross injustice in reprimanding him in such fulsome terms. "Refuge of the World", he pleaded, "Allah is my witness that someone has used my name to besmirch my honour, and turn Your Majesty against me."

Bahadur Shah was not appeased. Zeenat Mahal protested that no one but the vicious Fakhuru could have invented such a malicious lie. The next day Fakharuddin sent the King a deer which he had shot

in the course of a hunting excursion. Bahadur Shah declined to accept the gift and sent it back and said to the Prince's messenger, "your master is always acting in opposition to us, and we will not accept the present of a disloyal son. Indeed we do not acknowledge him as our son."

Fakharuddin's servant made a low obeisance and took his leave. The King's declaration, disowning his eldest son, caused no sensation and little surprise. The residents of the Palace had by now become accustomed to his fits of temper and his unrestrained outpouring of invectives. Nor did any one raise an eyebrow when only a few days later, on hearing a rumour that the British Government had decided to recognise Fakharuddin as Heir Apparent and would soon make an announcement to this effect, Bahadur Shah exclaimed: "Praised be Allah, Mirza Fakharuddin is the light of our eyes. We are, indeed, happy that the matter has been concluded in this manner. He is our son, our flesh and blood, and we are confident that after our death he will be accepted by everyone as our worthy successor." He paused and became thoughtful. Then after a moment he said: "This is the work of the Agent. He is clever, very clever, indeed." The next day, he held a durbar and made a public announcement that he had disinherited Fakharuddin. "He is no more our son. He cannot now lay claim to any right, title or property which vests in us. Let us see if the British Government has the temerity to disregard this momentous pronouncement."

The courtiers felt embarrassed by the solemn tone of the King's utterance. Hakim Ahsanullah felt this was not the place nor the time to offer his advice and maintained a discreet silence. The King spoke again. "We hereby divest him of the office of *Nazarat* which we conferred upon him at a time when we deemed him worthy of our confidence. We appoint Mirza Mughal as the holder of this important office. Further we withdraw the allowance which goes with this office and

order that henceforth it be paid to Mirza Mughal. Mirza Fakharuddin is moreover commanded to vacate the premises in Shah Burj now occupied by him. We allot the premises to Mirza Mughal. We withdraw the office of Qilladari from Mirza Fakharuddin and transfer it to Mirza Mughal."

Fakharuddin's response to these indignities was a gesture of resignation, and the remark: "Mirza Mughal is also a Prince and a son of His Majesty." But he refused to vacate the rooms in Shah Burj, and when a sum of Rs. 56 was deducted from his next month's allowance, he declined to accept the curtailed amount and made a strong protest to the Agent. He broadcast the distress occasioned by having been deprived of his means of sustenance. The King refused to restore the cut and when the Agent issued a court direction that the deduction from the Prince's stipend should be made good forthwith, Bahadur Shah was incensed. He declared that he had always exercised undisputed authority to apportion the allowances of the princes and *salateens* out of his consolidated allowance of one lakh rupees, and this interference with his rights was an innovation not to be tolerated. He called Zeenat Mahal Begum to his apartment and told her of the new development. Zeenat Mahal gave unrestrained expression to her resentment against the Agent and her step-son, making taunting remarks about the empty Majesty to which the imperious dynasty of Timur had been reduced by the perfidious British traders. Bahadur Shah was touched on a tender spot. He exclaimed: "We shall not pay the young rebel, and if the Agent takes the extreme step of paying him directly, we shall refuse our entire stipend. Let the Agent be informed of the royal decision in the matter."

Hakim Ahsanullah advised moderation. It would be unwise, he pleaded, to refuse the entire stipend. It was not impossible to imagine that the Agent might take His Majesty at his word, and hold back the royal revenues. This would certainly not improve matters.

The Hakim reminded the King, how on a previous occasion because of his unbending attitude in the matter of *nazrs*, the British officials had refused to observe the prescribed protocol and had withheld *nazrs* and presents worth Rs. 80,000. It would be better to write to the Agent, apprise him of the Prince's disgraceful conduct and once again draw attention to the King's absolute discretion in disbursing salaries and allowance to the inmates of the Palace. The King brooded over the suggestion for a day and then agreed.

But the Agent stood firm and insisted that justice required the restoration of the cut. The King now turned his wrath upon Fakharuddin, and publicly denounced him. He ordered the Hakim to prepare the draft of a letter which he proposed to address to the Lieutenant-Governor. But at this stage, the Agent had recourse to a subterfuge. He sent his clerk with the message that the King was at liberty to withhold Rs. 56 from Fakharuddin allowances but since it was customary to pay a maintenance allowance of Rs. 60 a month to the King's grandson, Fakharuddin's infant son, Khurshid Alam, should be paid his rightful dues. The clerk asked the King: "Your Majesty has nothing against the Prince Khurshid Alam?" "No," replied Bahadur Shah. "Then that settles the matter. I beg leave of Your Majesty," said the clerk and collecting his papers he bowed himself out of the Royal Presence.

The next day was Bahadur Shah's birthday, and at the durbar held to celebrate the occasion, he lashed out against the refractory prince. "We will not", he declared with considerable heat, "accept *nazrs* from Mirza Fakharuddin. We will not see him till the Day of Judgement and on that day, we shall stand before Allah and accept His supreme judgement. He will award punishment to whosoever is held deserving of it, and if it be I who has been at fault, I shall accept His decision. On the other hand if it should be Fakharuddin, he shall have to submit himself to the will of Allah."

One day towards the end of September, Bahadur Shah received a communication from the Agent informing him that the Governor-General had passed orders recognising Mirza Fakharuddin as Heir Apparent and successor to the throne of Delhi. A general sense of despondency and defeat took possession of the royal couple. Zeenat Mahal appealed to the King to do something for her and her son, so that after his death they should be able to live in security and comfort. Bahadur Shah saw history repeating itself. His father had striven to oust him from his rights on the selfsame grounds on which he was now basing his prerogative to name his ninth son Heir Apparent. Akbar Shah had the same apprehension about the future of his favourite wife, Mumtaz Mahal, and his favourite son, Mirza Jehangir. While he, Bahadur Shah, had publicly disowned and disinherited Fakharuddin, Akbar Shah had gone to the length of charging him, Abu Zafar, with incest. Abu Zafar had, on his formal installation as Heir Apparent, executed a bond undertaking to guarantee payment of adequate allowances to Mumtaz Mahal and Mirza Jehangir. He had also executed a pronote by way of collateral security. He remembered how he had at first protested against signing these documents, and then given way under his father's pressure and repeated threats. He asked Hakim Ahsanullah Khan to make a search for the bond and the pronote and produce them, so that Fakharuddin should be asked to execute similar documents.

But Fakharuddin categorically declined to enter into any future commitments. He sent back the reply: "I have been granted the title and status of Heir Apparent by the just and generous British and not by His Majesty. I see no reason for complying with the King's request."

A date for the investiture ceremony was fixed, and preparations were taken in hand to hold the durbar at which Fakharuddin would be formally

installed as the recognised *Waliahad*. One day before the ceremony, Bahadur Shah caused to be drawn up two deeds containing undertakings by the Heir Apparent that when he became King he would pay Rs. 3,323 each month to Zeenat Mahal Begum and Rs. 2,027 each month to Mirza Jawan Bakht. The revenues from some personal estates of the King were also to be paid to the Begum and the young prince. The deeds were sent to Fakharuddin with a *shooka* written by the King in his own hand in which he appealed to the good sense of the *Waliahad* to sign the deeds. He argued: "If you execute these deeds, you will greatly please us, but if you do not, your refusal will occasion great displeasure on our part. On the Day of Judgement you will stand condemned before the Exalted One."

A few minutes later Bahadur Shah went in person to persuade Fakharuddin to sign the deeds. The prince received him with every mark of respect and proffered a *nazr* of two gold mohars. The prince's father-in-law, Illahi Baksh, who was present, also offered a *nazr*. The King accepted the *nazr* and then without further ceremony, asked the prince to produce his signet and impress the deeds. When Fakharuddin showed his reluctance, the King said with asperity: "You will please us if you affix your signet upon the deeds, but if you decline we shall stand before Allah on the Day of Judgement, in the role of an accuser and charge you with injustice and unfilial conduct.."

Fakharuddin looked at the King standing menacingly before him and the group of courtiers watching him with unconcealed excitement. He took off his signet ring and handed it to the King. He sealed the deeds with his own hands and returned to his apartment.

At the investiture held the following day, the usual *khillat* as well as the magnificent ceremonial robes of the Heir Apparent and his Chair of State were conferred upon Fakharuddin. The prince, in turn, presented the

salutation *nazr* as also the *shukrana,* the thanksgiving, *nazr*. He then went behind the curtain to present a *nazr* to Zeenat Mahal Begum. The proceedings concluded by the Heir Apparent holding his own durbar, and receiving *nazrs* from the courtiers and other attendants.

The Agent had declined to countersign the deeds and Bahadur Shah felt chagrined and disappointed. He called all his Begums and concubines and spoke to them words of despair: "You must all make arrangements to safeguard your future, while I am still alive. Acquire houses for yourself outside the Palace, as it will go hard with you when I die, and my successor turns you out of the Red Fort. I see dark days ahead for all of us, yes even for myself."

A few days later when Bahadur Shah was sitting in the *Diwan-i-Khas* listening to the customary reports of household affairs, he heard the sound of horses hoofs and a medley of confused voices. Looking up he saw Fakharuddin riding up to the very terrace in front of the *Diwan-i-Khas.* He held a double barrelled gun in his right hand, and slung over the pommel of the saddle, was a bunch of partridges. One of the King's attendants had held of the reins and was trying to draw the Prince's mount away.

Bahadur Shah stood up. His voice choking with anger, he ordered the Prince to dismount immediately and present himself before him.

"What do you mean," he shouted in his shrill tone of anger. "What do you mean by riding up to this place. You have the courage, the temerity to misbehave in this fashion, when no one, not even the British Governor-General has done such a thing. You know very well that every one, *every one* dismounts at the *naqarkhana* and then proceeds upto the Lal Purdah on foot. The only person whose folly made him once ride up to the Lal Purdah during our absence from Delhi was that imprudent Resident Hawkins and you know what happened to him. He was reprimanded

by the Governor-General and removed from his office."

Bahadur Shah's voice was hoarse with passion. He looked at the group of courtiers who had assembled on hearing the disturbance, and taking a step forward pointed an accusing finger at Fakharuddin. His words poured out of him in a rapid torrent, scarcely intelligible. "And you who are the *Waliahad* not yet the King. not yet, ... you came riding up in this impertinent manner when we are sitting in the *Diwan-i-Khas* and attending to affairs of State. You are a rascal, a ruffian, a rebel. You....you....get out of my sight."

Fakharuddin stood with bowed head, while his inside rose up against him and his eyes were inflamed with anger. Restraining himself with great effort, he mumbled: "I did not know that Your Majesty was present here." Then he turned abruptly, and walked away without making the customary obeisance of bowing low three times and stepping back as far as the door.

Two days after the incident, another annoying occurrence took place. Bahadur Shah saw near the *naqarkhana* an elephant carrying two royal drums. Fakharuddin had asked for the royal suite to accompany him on a visit to a friend, and Bahadur Shah had accorded sanction to one *naqara* going with the Prince. Only the King himself when travelling in State took two *naqaras*. He enquired of the mahaut why two *naqaras* were being taken when only one had been sanctioned. The mahaut pleaded that a single *naqara* being very large and very heavy could not properly be carried on the elephant, and to balance the load, he had placed the second *naqara* on the other side of the elephant's back. The King made a wry face and forbade the mahaut from going out with the *naqara*.

A week later Bahadur Shah was surprised to receive from the Heir Apparent a formal invitation to a banquet in his apartments. A similar petition was addressed to Zeenat Mahal Begum. "The erring prince is at last learning to behave himself," he told

the Queen, and accepted the invitation. The banquet was most lavishly arranged and the royal guests were entertained by a sumptuous meal and a performance by the city's best singers and dancers. *Nazrs* were offered and silk and *pashmina* shawls were presented to them. The King once again pressed the Prince to sign the two deeds and insert a clause that he had executed them voluntarily and without any external pressure or undue influence. Fakharuddin was excessively polite and affable and promised to carry out his father's commands. At the same time he pleaded very humbly that Zeenat Mahal Begum should transfer possession of the Talkatora Garden, which though part of the King's ancestral property had to Fakharuddin's detriment been given over to her. Zeenat Mahal after a moment's hesitation agreed. When late that night the guests took their leave, everyone was in a happy and effusively friendly mood. Bahadur Shah declared that the Heir Apparent must henceforth be addressed as *Bada Sahib* as befitted his status.

But the reconciliation was short lived. Zeenat Mahal kept postponing the transfer of the Talkatora Garden and Fakharuddin insisted on this transfer being a pre-condition to his signing the deeds. Then one day the King learnt that the Prince had been paid a sum of Rs. 1,70,185 on account of the arrears of his stipend as Heir Apparent, because the British Government in recognising him as the lawful successor to the throne of Delhi, had done so retrospectively with effect from the date of Prince Dara Bakht's demise. Fakharuddin was jubilant and loudly praised the Governor-General's sense of justice and good faith. With greater insistence than before he asked Zeenat Mahal Begum to put him in possession of the Talkatora Garden or return the two deeds which had been spuriously executed by using his signet. Zeenat Mahal replied that the deeds would be sent back in four days.

The deeds were never returned, nor did she part with the possession of Talkatora Garden.

CHAPTER TWELVE

ZEENAT MAHAL Begum was unhappy. The hopes and ambitions which had filled her mind and exhilarated her first few years as the favourite queen and mistress of the Palace, had not been realised. The glamour of royalty had proved to be no more than the thin veneer of a shoddy and worthless possession, the King's body and mind had to be shared with a number of wives, concubines and slave girls in whose embraces the effete old man occasionally sought the titillation of his dying flesh. Her darling son had been denied the status which the King had promised to secure for him, and his place had been assigned to Mirza Fakharuddin who vaunted his success with increasing arrogance and boasted of the support he had received from the British officials. His learning and maturity of mind, his polished manners and his intellectual superiority had been justly recognised and rewarded. He strutted about the Palace as if he were already the King, and his father a figure of no significance whose end was fast approaching. It was galling to think that so much had been lost since the day she entered the Palace, resolved to establish her dominion over the throne and the kingdom of Delhi. Unlike the other members of the King's harem, she did not seek the satisfaction of her body's needs in illicit ways. She had no desire to take a young and robust lover to compensate the feeble embraces of her weak and emaciated husband. What she desired first and last was power, wealth, position, dignity, and the opportunity to command. All these had been denied to her in increasing

measure.

But she refused to accept defeat. There was nothing that determined human endeavour, aided by Allah the Beneficent, could not achieve. A way must be found, she constantly repeated to herself, a way whereby her enemies would be routed. And then success would come like a ripe fruit falling in her lap. It was unfortunate that her greatest ally and helper in the Palace, Mahboob Ali Khan had failed adequately to exploit his authority as mukhtar. Of late he had been complaining that the King had withdrawn the confidence once reposed in him. But, this, Zeenat Mahal argued, might be no more than a temporary estrangement caused by royal caprice. She called the eunuch one morning and took counsel with him.

"I am only a woman," she said to him." "I can only tell you what to do. It rests with you to find a way of doing it. And you must find a way if we are to be saved from defeat and ignominy."

"Your commands rest on my head and eyes, and I shall carry them out with the last breath of my life. But Your Majesty knows that the Refuge of the World is no longer pleased with me. He has even mentioned the subject of someone to replace me."

"Has he? Did he name any one?"

"No. He mentioned no name. In a moment of displeasure he remarked that if I did not start the construction of a garden, a mosque and a new residence for him, someone else could be entrusted with the task. And when I pleaded entire lack of funds to undertake the work, he became angry and shouted: 'It seems to me that you are fit only to guard the doors of the harem!'"

Zeenat Mahal could not repress her laughter. The King's taunt had its humorous side, and the look of discomfiture on the eunuch's face dissolved her melancholy mood.

"Any way, let that be. The King must have his joke. The point is that we cannot sit idle and feel

the earth slipping away from under our feet. Listen. There are four mountains we have to cross, four impediments which we must remove from our path."

"Presence. My whole body is ears."

"There is in the first place Thomas Metcalfe Sahib, the Agent at Delhi. He did not accept His Majesty's claim to nominate the *Waliahad.* He was the first to write in favour of Mirza Fakhroo, and you know that the first word has an importance out of all proportion to its true worth. Secondly there is James Thomason Sahib the Lieutenant-Governor through whom all letters and despatches are sent. We know that he strongly supported the Agent's recommendations. Then there is Elliot Sahib, the Governor-General's Secretary. He received Thomason Sahib's despatch and put it up to the Governor-General. He too supported Mirza Fakhroo. After that the Governor-General could not accept the King's claim. And lastly there is Mirza Fakhroo himself the biggest mountain in our way. Have you understood what we are saying?"

"Yes, Your Majesty. But......"

"But what? Mahboob Ali Khan. You must find a way. Go to our physician Imamuddin. We have complete faith in him. He will advise you. We have already spoken to him."

Dazed and bewildered, Mahboob Ali Khan left the Queen, and going to his apartment, sat a long time pondering and turning over what she had told him.

At this stage an unanticipated turn of events deepened Zeenat Mahal's gloom and made further demands on her ingenuity and determination. Two of Bahadur Shah's cousins, Mirza Hyder Shikoh and Mirza Nuruddin came from Lucknow to confer with him. They complained that they were in indigent circumstances and the pension which the British authorities paid them was totally inadequate. After all they were Shah Alam's grandsons. Shah Alam had

befriended the British and how far could a thousand rupees go when one had the obligation to live like a prince. Would Bahadur Shah do something for them, appoint them to an office of benefit or recommend their case to the British Agent?

Bahadur Shah began to bewail his own lot, the intransigence of the local officials and their obduracy in refusing to recognise his royal prerogatives.

"My own servants are unable to serve me faithfully," he confided. "They are ignorant, incompetent and dishonest. Hakim Ahsanullah is loyal, but he is not sufficiently instructed in law, nor is he able to represent my case to the best advantage. As for Mahboob Ali Khan, he is after all a eunuch, I am not at all sure of his integrity. I have heard that he has carried away royal property and carpets to his house in Karnal. I had to reprimand him for being impertinent to the Agent and the Commandant when they came to pay me a visit. I ordered him to have the Shah Burj repaired, but nothing has been done. Really, I am quite tired of the eunuch."

Hyder Shikoh was all sympathy and attention and offered to resolve Bahadur Shah's difficulties at once. Bahadur Shah must make a personal appeal to the Governor-General and invoke the help of the *Wazir* of Oudh who enjoyed the goodwill of the British. "I shall myself undertake this simple task," he said, "and I guarantee that I shall bring it to a successful conclusion. Also Your Majesty must immediately replace Mahboob Ali Khan by a more reliable and competent mukhtar. This, too, I can arrange. Seth Govind Chand, a wealthy merchant of Lucknow, will be willing to take charge of Your Majesty's affairs and give entire satisfaction in the performance of his duties."

Hyder Shikoh was a handsome man in his early forties. He had a courtier's charm, the bearing of a prince and the plausibility of a rogue. In his proposal Bahadur Shah saw the light of hope and a means of achieving his long-cherished wishes. He at once agreed.

Hyder Shikoh and Nuruddin left Delhi, armed with the King's full authority to act on his behalf in all matters. A week later, the Seth's representative arrived in Delhi and sought the King's audience. He offered a *nazr* of seven gold mohars, five trays of white clothes and a jewelled perfume-sprinkler. He presented appropriate *nazrs* also to Fakharuddin, Zeenat Mahal Begum and Mirza Jawan Bakht.

Zeenat Mahal accepted the *nazr* without making any comment. But later, when she saw the King, she bitterly complained about the contemplated change. She argued that Mahboob Ali Khan had worked to her entire satisfaction. "Your Majesty appointed me mukhtar, and Mahboob Ali my assistant and representative. I cannot now deal with a new assistant, and how am I to converse with him and give him directions?"

The King listened in silence, and made no reply.

Zeenat Mahal renewed her attack with greater vigour. How could anyone repose confidence in a total stranger whose antecedents were unknown. The Seth from Lucknow must be wholly ignorant of Palace customs and household management. She concluded by delivering an ultimatum. "I have," she declared, "spent a sum of Rs. 1,75,000 out of my own funds, and before the Seth is appointed mukhtar, my debt must be discharged".

The King looked at Zeenat Mahal with unconcealed anger. Where had so much money been spent, how had she raised it, and why was he not informed of this transaction till now? These were questions he would have liked to ask, but to ask them would be openly to accuse her of dishonesty. So he left them unuttered, and said: "We shall do what is most proper."

As soon as he was alone he called the Hakim and had a letter sent to the Agent, informing him that he had appointed Seth Govind Das as his mukhtar. He then went to the apartments of Akhtar Mahal Begum

a young and vivacious girl whom he had introduced into the royal harem two years ago, and had of late neglected. He was pleased with the welcome he received and remained with her till a late hour.

Seth Govind Das now arrived in person and petitioned Bahadur Shah to supply him with curtains, carpets and other furnishings in conformity with his dignity and status as the King's mukhtar. Bahadur Shah in turn sent instructions to the Seth to have a sum of Rs. 40,000 ready when he came to take charge of his duties, and to start work on the construction of a new royal residence, garden and mosque in the Red Fort. The Seth promptly sent his messenger to petition the King for an audience so that the Seth might present his *nazr*. The messenger was charged with the task of specifying in advance the particulars of the *nazrs* – 101 trays of sweets, clothes, etc., jewels, an elephant and a horse. But should His Majesty so desire the Seth was willing to give a cash *nazr* of equal value. The King would no doubt, added the messenger, be pleased to confer the title of Rajah on the Seth's son, Gopal Chand, who would stay in Delhi as the mukhtar's representative.

Bahadur Shah indicated his preference for a monetary *nazr*, and at the Nauroz Darbar which opportunely fell due now, he bestowed upon Gopal Chand the title of Maharaja, and signified his assent to the arrangement whereby Gopal Chand would perform the duties of the mukhtar under the guidance and supervision of his father and subject to the ultimate control of Zeenat Mahal Begum, the King's mukhtar-in-chief. Maharaja Gopal Chand, accompanied by his uncle and cousin, attended the durbar and presented *shukrana nazrs* totalling 85 gold sovereigns and Rs. 5,500 in silver coins (representing the value of 101 trays, jewels, an elephant and a horse). He also presented a *nazr* of five gold sovereigns and one thousand silver rupees to Zeenat Mahal Begum and four gold sovereigns to Mirza Jawan Bakht.

Gopal Chand could not directly communicate with Zeenat Mahal. He requested Mahboob Ali Khan to give him a list of the palace servants and the amounts of their salaries, so that the salaries should be promptly disbursed as soon as the monthly stipend of the King was received. Mahboob Ali's response was a deferential gesture and a flowery speech, referring the Seth to the Queen. The Seth sought the King's directions. The King talked to him for a long time on the subject of his project for a residence, a garden and a mosque, showed him the spots which he had chosen for the purpose and discussed details of structural plans. Gopal Chand listened with divided attention, waiting for the answer to his questions. At the end of the long interview, the King suggested that the Seth should send for his mother. This, he said, would facilitate negotiations between the Seth and the Queen. Gopal Chand presented a *shukrana nazr* and craved leave to depart. The King graciously bestowed on him a chaplet of flowers and committed his visitor to Allah's protective hand.

The next day another durbar was held, and Bhadur Shah advised Mahboob Ali Khan to work in harmony with the Seth. Mahboob Ali stated that he had incurred some expenses on royal works which he had carried out, and if the new mukhtar reimbursed him he was prepared to hand over the list to him. Gopal Chand made a further investment by presenting five gold sovereigns to Zeenat Mahal and two to the King. But Zeenat Mahal was not appeased and Mahboob Ali remained recalcitrant. Three days later another durbar was held and Gopal Chand repeated his request for the list of salaries. The King ordered the eunuch to deliver the relevant papers to the Seth. Mahboob expressed his readiness to obey the King's command, but pleaded that the repayment of his dues must be a condition precedent to his parting with the records. This open flouting of his orders provoked a splendid exhibition of royal temper. "Mahboob Ali

Khan," he wrathfully exclaimed, "has been dealing with all our revenues, and he must furnish a full account. How is it possible that he has been able to spend such a large amount over and above the royal income? Where did he obtain the money from? What was his source? We made a mistake. We made a great mistake. We should have known what to expect of a keeper of the harem door."

Bahadur Shah's voice rose to an angry scream. "And don't bring in the name of Zeenat Mahal Begum. She had no money except what she has taken from our revenues. The whole thing is a complete fraud."

Later in the day when the King's temper had had time to cool down, Gopal Chand again sought royal audience, and pleaded his case. His situation, he said was embarrassing and difficult in the extreme. "People in the city tell me that no reliance can be placed in Your Majesty's constancy. It will not be easy for me to recover the monies I have already spent, and I am wholly unable to discharge the functions of my offices." The King heard the Seth's complaint with unusual patience and promised relief. He spoke to Zeenat Mahal Begum and gave directions to the Hakim to smooth matters over. He called Mahboob Ali Khan and the Seth's assistant, Ghulam Ali, and made them embrace each other in his presence. Each gave an undertaking that he would work amicably with the other in dealing with the King's affairs. But the very next day Zeenat Mahal complained that there was a shortfall of Rs. 1,400 in the newly received stipend. She had made good the deficiency, but it was only fair that the Seth should bear half the loss. The stipend had been received by Zeenat Mahal personally as mukhtar-in-chief, and never before had such a discrepancy occurred. The Seth, however, agreed to pay Rs. 700 as his share of the shortfall, requesting at the same time that, in future, the salaries might be disbursed in the presence of the royal accountant.

The statement of royal disbursements was, how-

ever, not delivered to the Seth. He once again complained to the King, and the King delivered himself of an angry harangue against Mahboob Ali. The Hakim promised to intervene. But the situation remained unchanged. The Seth and his son waited upon Zeenat Mahal on two days in succession, and pleaded that without Mahboob Ali's co-operation they were powerless. Was it not possible for him to associate himself with them in all matters, or else dissociate himself completely, and leave the Seth exclusively to deal with everything? Zeenat Mahal retorted: "Why did you not make this submission when you put in the original agreement? You are raising difficulties where none exist."

Forthwith a rumour spread through the city that the new mukhtar had proved utterly unequal to the task he had rashly undertaken, and that he was abandoning his post. When Bahadur Shah heard this he said there was no truth whatsoever in the allegation, and the entire management of the Palace affairs would be entrusted to the Seth. He held a durbar the next day and commanded everyone to attend with the usual *nazrs*. Gopal Chand repeated his complaint that Mahboob Ali was most obstructive. "Your Majesty," he pleaded, "if I cannot be given complete control, I should be permitted to return home." The King immediately ordered Mahboob Ali to make over all the Palace affairs to the Seth. The eunuch bowed his head in compliance, and said he would not interfere in anything. Thereupon the King ordered all his servants to refer every matter concerning the Palace to the Seth. He assured Gopal Chand that he would thenceforth receive all the royal income and deal with it. As earnest of his confidence in the Seth, he asked for Rs. 600, of which Gopal Chand, at once, advanced Rs. 200.

On hearing the report of the proceedings at the durbar, Zeenat Mahal left the Palace taking the young Prince Jawan Bakht with her. Bahadur Shah found her absent from her apartment. No one could tell him

where she had gone. She had left no word indicating her destination. A messenger sent to her house in Lal Kua returned with the report that she had not gone there. Nor was she in her father's house. Someone said she had gone to Karnal, seventy miles away. The King was distracted. He spent a sleepless night imagining the worst calamities. In the morning there was no news of the Queen or the Prince. No one had seen them on the road to Karnal. Just when he had given up hope of seeing her, he was informed that she had returned to her apartments. He almost ran there to see her. The moment he entered she began to weep and bewail her lot. What a miserable life she led. She was the Queen of the country, but only in name. She had no power, no rank, no dignity. She did not even enjoy the trust and the confidence of her royal spouse. Suddenly she stifled her sobs, and lashed out in anger: "Have I not always jealously guarded Your Majesty's interests? Never have I permitted any improper expenditure. Never have I contracted any unnecessary debts. And yet there has always been money available for whatever Your Majesty needed. The Seth is a wicked interloper. He does not understand the business of the royal household. He has falsely accused Mahboob Ali Khan of pilfering property from the *toshakhana*. Is it fair to place under suspicion such an old and trusted servant of Your Majesty? Command the Seth to appear before you and prove his allegation. He has made aspersions even against me. Am I not your well-wisher, your devoted wife, the mother of your darling prince?"

Saying this, Zeenat Mahal threw herself on the bed and began to shake with sobs and cries of anguish. Bahadur Shah uttered words of sympathy, and love, but she remained unconsoled. "Promise me, promise me," she moaned, "that you will dismiss the Seth and reinstate Mahboob Ali as mukhtar under my control." Bahadur Shah finally conceded. "My heart aches to

see you in such distress. It will be as you say."

The next morning Mahboob Ali Khan was directed to resume exclusive charge of the household affairs. Orders were issued that the Seth was not to be saluted and he and his associates were to be denied access to the Palace. The staff attached to him was withdrawn. The King said this was being done because the Seth had hopelessly failed to perform his duties and had been grossly negligent since he had not even commenced the construction of the new residence and the mosque which he had been commanded to take in hand.

Mahboob Ali Khan did not rest content with a simple victory. He proceeded to humiliate and mortify his defeated rival. The Seth on receiving his order of dismissal made a demand for the expenses incurred by him in travelling to Delhi, setting up his establishment, advancing loans to the King and presenting him with a magnificent and costly *nazr*. He prayed that he was entitled to be reimbursed to the extent of Rs. 14,000. The King asked for detailed accounts. The Seth sent his accountant with a memorandum in which he submitted most humbly that he had done nothing to merit the indignity of being forbidden entry into the Palace. He had spent more than Rs. 22,000 but all he prayed for was that he be permitted to appear before His Majesty, explain his position and take his leave.

The King sent the account to Mahboob Ali for settlement. Mahboob Ali took time to scrutinise the Seth's papers, and ten days later reported that there were inflated and excessive entries, and the Seth had exaggerated his claim. "Well, then," said the King "pay him whatever is fair and proper." Mahboob Ali once again examined the records and the receipts of the various items of expenditure. He reduced the Seth's claim by a thousand rupees and recommended that the amount on household expenses be paid in annual instalments of Rs. 1,000 and the amount re-

presenting the *nazr* be paid by the British Agent out of the revenue from the King's personal property. The King promptly agreed.

When the Seth heard the King's judgement, he shook his head in despair. He was a rich man with an extensive business, he had come to Delhi not to gain wealth but honour and dignity and perhaps the patronage which his status would have given him. But he could ill afford to lose so much money. "Instalments!" he murmurred. "It will take thirteen years to make up the loss incurred in the course of a month." What is the guarantee, he asked himself that the King would keep his word. Would he even live for another thirteen years? He is eighty years of age, and when he dies, will not his personal property lapse to the Company Bahadur? No, he could not accept such an iniquitous decree. He appealed to the King to pay him the entire amount in a lump sum. The King took no notice of the appeal, and when a week later the Seth repeated his request, he observed, "The Seth is being instigated by my ill-wishers to make this unreasonable demand. If he is not prepared to accept payment by instalments he can please himself."

Weeks passed and there was no further communication from the Palace. The Seth waited, hoping against hope that some power would instil a sense of justice in the King and Mahboob Ali. Finally, in desperation, he again approached Mahboob Ali Khan, and begged him to smooth matters over with the King, so that he could return home without the stain which his sudden and unceremonious dismissal from the Palace had placed on his honour. To this request, he added the promise of a substantial consideration. Mahboob Ali smiled, gave a patronising pat on the Seth's back and said he would place the matter before His Majesty.

Several weeks passed. The mangoes were once again in season.

Bahadur Shah spent the morning watching a

fight between a bull-dog recently purchased by Jawan Bakht and a buffalo belonging to one of the *salateens*. The fight was long and bloody and excitement ran high. Bets were laid by Bahadur Shah and several of the princes. In the end the dog won, and the buffalo, badly lacerated and bitten below the neck and abdomen, lay down exhausted. The bull-dog had to be dragged away by men shouting triumphant cries. Bahadur Shah returned to his apartments, pleased with the entertainment. On a low marble-topped table he saw a basket of large green mangoes, with a note from the Agent. He picked up a mango and turned it in his hand. It had a firm ripe feel. When pressed gently between the fingers, its flesh yielded the merest trace of a dimple. Bahadur Shah ordered that the fruits, fifteen in number were to be reserved for his table. After his evening stroll in the Palace garden, he sent for the mangoes and consumed the entire lot.

During the night he was woken up by a severe attack of colic. Hakim Ahsanullah was summoned to his bed-side. He shook his head and administered a sedative. The next morning the King was worse, intense gripping pains made him feel weak and faint with exhaustion. The Hakim complained that His Majesty had eaten too many mangoes and too much red pepper. Bahadur Shah held his head in his hands, rocking from side to side and groaned. "No, no," he said, "I have had only fifteen mangoes. What is fifteen when I have had many more several times previously. Towards the evening his condition deteriorated. Alms were given to the poor; gram, money and clothing were distributed. Late at night, he called Fakharuddin to his bedside and said in a faint whisper that his end was near. "Be kind and affectionate to Zeenat Mahal Begum and Jawan Bakht. This is my last request to you." Fakharuddin sat down and began to weep, shedding tears profusely. The next day there was a slight improvement, and to the Agent's enquiry if the illness had been brought on by eating too many

of the mangoes he had sent, he replied with a couplet in Urdu.

Mangoes, O my son, are highly nourishing,
They do no harm, for me they are health-giving.

But for four long months, he lay suffering and paying for his indiscretion and lack of control over the demands of his palate. Each time his condition improved, he ate food forbidden by medical advisers and lost the ground gained by the combined offorts of hakims and physicians. On Zeenat Mahal's earnest pleading, he allowed her personal hakim, Imamuddin to treat him. She said he had no faith in Ahsanullah. On this Ahsanullah took umbrage and complained of the King's want of confidence in an old and loyal servant. When Imamuddin came the next day, the King refused to drink a concoction prepared by him from the concentrated essence of several medicines. Imamuddin sulked and said: "If Your Majesty does not accept my medicine, it is no use my attending."

"But I have already taken two pills for dysentery. I shall take a little meat gravy in the afternoon."

The next day he said his dysentery was worse, and he felt a burning sensation in his liver. "*Hai,* Allah, I am, indeed, very ill," he moaned and fainted. Zeenat Mahal who was by his bedside became alarmed and sent for Hakim Ahsanullah Khan. "Look," she said in an angry tone, "look at the unhappy condition of the Refuge of the World. This is the result of the medicine you gave him." A fresh medicament was prepared and administered. The symptoms of dysentery re-appeared, and the King spent a painful night.

Two days later he had rallied sufficiently to call Ahsanullah to a private audience and say to him: "By Allah's mercy and your constant attention, I have somewhat recovered. Some people said you were in league with my enemies, and you might give me some injurious medicine; that is why I associated Hakim Imamuddin with you."

"Presence," submitted Ahsanullah in a low voice

tremulous with humility and distress, "such a suspicion is a most grievous accusation. But I shall say nothing at this moment. When your Majesty's health is completely restored, I shall pray for my discharge from service."

"No, no," protested the King, "I have perfect faith in your loyalty, and I shall retain you as long as I live."

The recovery was slow and delayed by many relapses. Once he felt well enough to talk about fixing a date for his *ghusl-i-sehat*, the ceremonial bath of recovery, and he discussed the matter of awarding *khillats* to the physicians who had treated him. Zeenat Mahal pressed for an equal recognition of her physician, Imamuddin. When this came to Ahsanullah's knowledge, he spoke his mind frankly to the King:

"Your Majesty knows that Imamuddin is the Begum's hakim, and she associated him with your slave in consequence of her suspicions. The Begum can grant him a *khillat*. I should not like him to receive from Your Majesty a *khillat* equal to mine."

"Yes, Ahsanullah, that is only fair."

But there was again a serious setback and one evening, lying with his feet swollen, and his stomach emptied out by excessive diarrhoea, he succubmed to the temptation of eating a quantity of mango preserve. This had the instant consequence of prostrating him with a renewed and an even more virulent attack of diarrhoea. Ahsanullah could not restrain himself and said: "If Your Majesty is going to behave in this childish and irresponsible manner, you should first dismiss me." Bahadur Shah, feeling faint with pain and exhaustion, murmurred an excuse and promised greater abstinence in future.

He lay semi-conscious for a long time, occasionally mumbling and uttering incoherent sounds. It seemed the end was fast approaching. Zeenat Mahal seized an opportunity to load all her personal property on carts, and sent it to her house in Lal Kua. Two days later, she sent away some more goods from the Palace,

and accompanied by Jawan Bakht, left the Palace to reside in Lal Kua. She made no secret of her design to safeguard her future in the event of the King's death. When she came to see him the next day, she made a request that a guard be provided to accompany her back and forth between the Palace and Lal Kua.

Bahadur Shah survived the long and painful illness. Sustained by the innate vigour of his body, hardened by constant training and long years of riding, hunting, practising archery and outdoor sports, he regained his strength little by little. When the hakims pronounced him completely cured, he took his *ghusl-i-sehat*, and lying on a couch held a Recovery Durbar.

All this time Seth Gopal Chand had been waiting, hoping for the re-imbursement of the money he had spent on the King's account, or at any rate, to receive some mark of royal favour to wash away the ignominy of his dismissal and his exclusion from entry into the Palace. Now, more than six months after his preemptory eviction from the Red Fort, when the King was well again, he renewed his petition. He was allowed to enter the royal presence and pay his respects. He made no mention of his claim. He did not refer to the monies he had expended on account of the King. He made a sevenfold low obeisance, offered a *nazr* and said with utmost humility. "Refuge of the World, I have remained in Delhi all this time, praying for Your Majesty's recovery and long life. I have been sustained by the hope of being granted this interview, and now that my heart's desire has been fulfilled, I shall return home a happy man."

The King expressed his pleasure by bestowing upon him a shawl and a robe. The Seth presented a second *nazr* by way of thanksgiving and took his leave.

The messenger who brought news of the Lieutenant-Governor's death at Bareilly also said that the

Agent Bahadur was confined to bed with an attack of fever and diarrhoea. "What!" exclaimed Bahadur Shah, "Thomason Sahib is dead. How did he die? What ailed him? May he find peace in the mercy of Allah."

"Presence," said the messenger, "the Lieutenant-Governor Bahadur was on tour, when he was suddenly taken ill. They say he had a severe attack of diarrhoea. For five days he suffered and then Allah's merciful hand liberated his soul."

Bahadur Shah called the Hakim and directed him to send a letter of condolence to the Governor-General at Calcutta. The Hakim's face showed concern. "Have you heard, Refuge of the World?", he asked in a whisper, "the Agent Bahadur fell ill last night. They say his condition is serious."

Bahadur Shah nodded darkly. "Send a messenger," he said, "to make enquiries on our behalf, and say we pray for his rapid recovery."

A week later Metcalfe was no better. Bahadur Shah on returning from an excursion across the river, was told that the Agent Bahadur's condition had deteriorated. Bahadur Shah had sustained an injury to his shoulder by the sharp recoil of a new fowling-piece, and the wound was bleeding. As soon as this had been attended to, he sent a special messenger to the Agent, offering the services of Hakim Ahsanullah Khan. The messenger came back carrying the Agent's thanks and a solicitous enquiry about Bahadur Shah's health and the wound caused by the concussion of the gun. He also said that though the Agent's son was agreeable to Ahsanullah treating the patient, the European surgeon in attendance was firmly opposed to it.

The next morning news was brought to the Palace that Sir Thomas had died during the night. Zeenat Mahal's reaction was a frank and uninhibited expression of satisfaction with the manner in which Allah had been pleased to deal with her enemies. "First

Thomason Sahib and now the Agent." She gloated: "Metcalfe Sahib was the one who laboured most to deprive my darling son of his rights. It is well that he should receive the reward of his misdeeds." "No, Begum," said Bahadur Shah, "Metcalfe Bahadur was not a bad man." "You do not understand anything," lashed out the Queen. "I suppose you will say that the Lieutenant-Governor Bahadur was also not a bad man, nor is Elliot Sahib a bad man. Very well, let them all be good men, but they prevented my son from becoming *Waliahad:* and now, great is Allah, two of them have gone to give proof of their goodness before the Supreme Judge."

"Do not talk like this, Begum," Bahadur Shah pleaded. "We have enemies everywhere. The walls have ears. There are rumours of........you know what."

"Yes, yes. I know. The gossip of idle tongues. But I didn't poison them, did I? If someone did, he performed a most pious deed."

Bahadur Shah was unhappy about the Begum's outburst. She was prone to make indiscreet remarks. The British were powerful and ruthless. There were spies in the Palace. Something said in a moment of excitement might lead to terrible consequence. Thanks be to Allah, Elliot Sahib was on his way home. He had been advised a change of air and had taken leave and sailed for London.

A few days later the Hakim came and prayed for a private audience. "*Takhlia*" commanded the King. As soon as everyone had withdrawn, the Hakim began speaking in a grave tone.

"There is very bad news. Elliot Sahib has died. He was somewhat indisposed when he sailed from Calcutta. On the way his malady took a turn for the worse, and he died at Simon's Tower, Cape of Good Hope."

"May his soul find peace in the benevolence of Allah," exclaimed Bahadur Shah. "We are very griev-

ed to hear of this calamity."

"Indeed, Refuge of the World, it is a calamity. A strange and vicious rumour is being whispered about in the city and I deem it my duty to inform Your Majesty of what is being said:

"Speak, we are listening."

"They are saying that all the three officers were poisoned. The symptoms of all three were similar. A European doctor in the Civil Lines is reported to have said he is convinced all three men have been poisoned, and Mirza Fakharuddin should take good care of what he eats and where he dines."

Bahadur Shah felt worried. He knew there were secret vegetable preparations known to Indian physicians which caused slow death and defied detection. Finely ground glass had been used to the same purpose without arousing suspicion. Zeenat Mahal Begum was far too outspoken in giving vent to her sentiments on the subject of Jawan Bakht's opponents. He must be careful in his dealings with Fakharuddin and warn Zeenat Mahal to be more tactful.

Gradually with the passage of time, the rumours died a natural death. There were no further incidents which could be ascribed to vendetta, and Fakharuddin continued to live a normal healthy life in the Palace in close proximity of his dreaded enemy. He conducted himself with dignity and poise. He paid off all his debts, and from his handsome stipend he was able to indulge his taste for horses, elephants, jewels and rare books. Indeed his readiness to spend money was characterised by the King as needless and ostentatious extravagance. One day, some equestrian acrobats visiting Delhi proposed to give a private performance in the Palace for a sum of Rs. 1,000. The King declined to pay more than Rs. 600. Fakharuddin promptly offered to pay the balance of Rs. 400. The King refused to entertain the Heir Apparent's proposition which he looked upon as a piece of impertinence. Fortunately the acrobats agreed to perform for Rs. 600, and their

show was much appreciated. Fakharuddin, not to be outdone, arranged another performance at his own cost and invited the King to it. But the King went into a sulk and declined the invitation.

Three years passed. Then suddenly, one day, Fakharuddin was taken ill. His symptoms were similar to those observed in the case of Thomason and Metcalfe. The Hakim diagnosed the malady as an attack of cholera. A few cases of cholera had occurred in the city, but when Fakharuddin died after an illness of five days, it was whispered as an open secret that Zeenat Mahal with the help of her family physician Hakim Naqi Khan had poisoned him. Bahadur Shah stood by his son's bedside and wept.

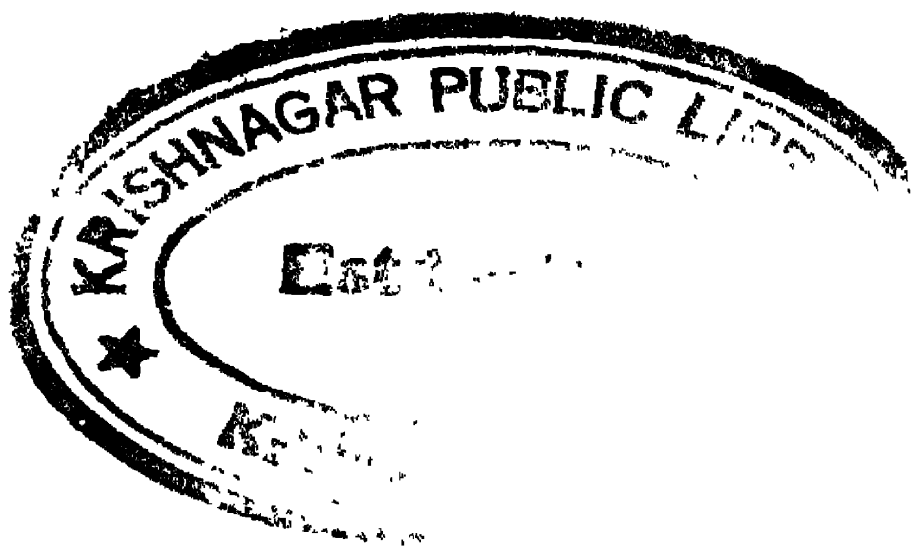
The new Agent visited the Palace a day after Fakharuddin's death. The King handed him a written request that now Jawan Bakht should be declared Heir Apparent. Attached to this was a document signed by eight of his sons in which they expressed their concurrence with the King's request. The Agent was greatly surprised, but promised to refer the matter to higher authorities.

The very next day Mirza Koaish, now the eldest son of Bahadur Shah, wrote to the Agent retracting his consent and alleging that the eight princes had signed the document as the result of inducement and pressure by the King. "I do not wish", he wrote, "to disobey my respected father's commands, but when I learnt that at the instigation of Zeenat Mahal, he proposes to deprive me of my right to be appointed *Waliahad*, I am compelled to appeal to the British Government. I am the King's eldest son. I have learnt the Holy Koran by heart and have made the pilgrimage to Mecca. You may assess my talents after a personal interview."

After sending his petition Mirza Koaish waited hopefully while days, weeks and months passed, and it was the year 1857.

BOOK FOUR

REBEL

This sudden change of wind, alas, has robbed me of
my peace of mind,
What boots it to relate my woes, my heavy heart with
grief is riven.
Ruin has seized the Indian people, their sufferings are
beyond my speech,
Whoso caught the tyrant's eye was reckoned worthy
of the scaffold.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

MAY IS the month of madness and unreason, of despair and despondency. The bracing cold of January, the soothing wrap of February sunshine, the tepid, delicious bath of March cosiness with its brightness of blossoms and splashes of colour have receded so far back into the mist of memory that nothing remains of them. April was hot, so hot that it burnt and wrenched off the soft velvety petals of the jacarandas, and then sprinkled them down to spread a bright indigo carpet round each tree-trunk for a brief day or two. The glory of gul-mohar came and flashed out of sight, leaving only a shock of dull and dusty foliage. For weeks now, a relentless sun has uneasingly stoked the furnace of Nature; from the cauldron of the sky a continuous outpouring of fire has laid the earth desolate, and parched every throat. There are weeks and weeks of this still to come before the first thirst-quenching rain drops begin to fall and fill the air with the delicious perfume of their sizzling alchemy with sun-baked earth. Yes, July is far away yet, and men's minds cannot break away from the bondage of May to seek comfort in the distant prospect of July. Of all the opposite states of mind, human beings find it hardest to evoke the experience of heat and cold. Just as it is impossible to simulate a sense of intense heat when shivering and shuddering in conditions of arctic cold, so, in the month of May, it is beyond the mind's fancy to recollect the biting cold winds that swept the vast stretch of ancient ruins beyond the southern aspect of the city wall, making it possible to freeze as much as an inch-thick layer in

the ice-makers' pans. In the month of May the dehydrated, drooping and wilted mind cannot conjure up the desire to bask in the sun or crowd round the braziers packed with hot luminous charcoals. The now and the present is so oppressing, so devitalising that a state of helplessness, of utter frustration, takes possession of mankind.

In the year 1857, the month of Ramzan all but coincided with the month of May. In Ramzan, devout Muslims are enjoined to fast during the hours of day-light for thirty days. Each morning they get up before dawn, and with the heaviness of sleep weighing down their eyes and slowing their movements, they prepare a meal, and overcoming their disinclination to eat at such an unusual hour, fill their stomachs as if eating were a purely religious ritual and not a physiological need. Then, during the long waking hours of daylight, they must remain without food, drink or smoke. In the evening, when the guns are fired and the *muezzin* announces the end of the fast, the devout go home to eat and drink and take deep lung-filling pulls at their *hookas.* Ramzan moves a few days back in the solar calender each year. So the fasting period recesses through the seasons. It is easiest to obey the precepts of the holy Koran when Ramzan falls in the winter months and most difficult when it coincides with May or June.

On the morning of May 11, Bahadur Shah was sitting near the marble lattice-work window of the Suman Burj. He had said his morning prayers, and was waiting for his riding horses to be brought out. He planned to ride across the boat-bridge over the Jamuna and into the woods beyond. He was not going to hunt, but his bowmen and his gunmen would be accompanying him and if he felt so inclined, he would fire a shot or practise a little archery. He had travelled a long way from the days when he used to pull up a weight of three maunds by drawing a chain with his thumb and two fingers, or at full gallop, shoot down a

partridge on the wing. Yes, indeed, he had travelled a long way since then. It was forty-seven years from the day when he had learnt that the King, his father, would formally invest him with the title and status of Heir Apparent to the throne of Delhi. What joys and hopes the announcement had raised in him! He had allowed his imagination to run wild, and in his thoughts, he had destroyed so many things, demolished so many useless ugly structures and built so many new and beautiful ones. He had planned to revive the moribund glory of the House of Timur, to extend his influence and bring his people back to him by love, persuasion and example. He would, he told himself, transform Delhi till it was once again the great and imperial city of magnificence, wealth and culture. Music, poetry, literature, philosophy, commerce would flourish there once again. The sophisticated glory of Akbar's durbar, the architectural activity of Shahjahan need not die. He was a scholar, a poet, a hedonist with a passion for life; at the same time, he was a divine and a philosopher who had made some original contribution to human thought. He understood horses and quails and partridges. He was the best shot in the country, and yet his intricately constructed cryptograms and his calligraphy equalled, in delicacy and neatness, the work of the most skilled and soft-fingered craftsman. He had an eye for buildings and could plan a garden as well as Jehangir. He had wanted to lay down parks with fountains and flowing water, flowering trees and evergreen borders, lawns and flower-beds, marble pavilions and pleasure palaces.

These were the things he had planned just forty-seven years ago. But then had followed long years of waiting, waiting not in a state of peace and security, but in almost continuous peril of being deprived of his status and sometimes even of his life. The old king had lived on and on, and had never ceased to make assaults on his position and strive to eject him. He had been obliged to possess his soul and watch.

He could not, like one of his forbears, muster an army, wipe out the danger and make himself secure and powerful. There was no army, he had no followers, and the British were all powerful. If he had so much as taken a single independent step, he would have been quietly and unostentatiously removed without any of his countrymen raising a protest. He would have been deprived of even the little he had. So, he had to be content with his heir-apparentship, and continue to cherish the hopes that rose up within him, while he prayed to Allah and led a simple life.

And so the years had passed, ten, fifteen, twenty, and finally he had, one dark night, been granted the right to sit on the royal throne and savour the taste of his newly acquired prerogatives. But it had been no more than a narrow, personal, intimate experience not susceptible of extension into the world around him. He was king but he did not possess any of the attributes of true kinghood. He had no real power, no army capable of taking arms and fighting at his command, no money in the treasury beyond the monthly pittance vouchsafed by the British, and that was soon expended and gone before the next instalment fell due. His efforts to increase the wholly inadequate allowance had been rebuffed. His powers had not increased one whit, and alas, arts and commerce had not flourished under his patronage to the extent he had hoped for and visualised. In the field of architecture, all that he had been able to achieve was the construction of a small structure grandiosely called Zafar Mahal and two diminutive pavilions, Sawan and Bhadon. As for the gardens, Jehangir, the great architect of Shalimar and Nishat, would laugh with derision as he looked down from his heavenly abode on the plain and unadorned Hyat Baksh Garden, which was all Bahadur Shah could boast of. This was the sum total of his hopes and plans and his striving over a period of twenty years. During this time he had aged and grown weak. He was eighty-two now, a ripe old man, ripe and unfulfilled, ripe and

ready to drop into an insignificant grave.

Not that Bahadur Shah had ever been under any delusions regarding his true status *vis-a-vis* the paramount power of the East India Company, even though the Company's status in law was no more than that of a grantee, a subject, a vassal. He had never thought that he was capable of re-conquering India and recovering the heritage of his ancestors. There was never any possibility of his gaining an empire in the positive ruthless manner of Timur or re-conquering it with the determined ferocity of Babar and extending it with the firmness and diplomacy of Akbar. He realised, at heart, what he was, and as he had grown old and decrepit—yes, there was no doubt at all, at eighty-two he was old and decrepit—his faults and shortcomings had increasingly appeared before his mind's eye in their true dimensions. He was a weak and vacillating character incapable of sustaining a purpose for longer than a few moments. His determination was no more than a momentary excitement, an outburst of temper. His hedonism was merely a desire to cling desperately to the vanished glory of the Mughal Empire. It was a false and unreal hope that made him glorify the tinsel parade of durbars and ceremonial functions. In reality, he was just a greedy old man who had nearly killed himself four years ago by gorging more mangoes than his infirm and exhausted digestion could cope with. Whatever vigour he possessed in the days of his youth was now spent and gone. Zeenat Mahal had long ago given up titillating his unresponsive and shrunken manhood. The young dancing girl he had brought to his harem fourteen years ago was the last desperate attempt of an old man to delude himself. It was strange that God should fill his people with desires which they could never fully satisfy. The hunger and the longing persisted long after the strength to minister to them had departed and even after the capacity to satisfy them had ceased to exist. Only a futile and effete tingling of the body and a desperate yearning of the mind

remained to tantalize and torture the Soul. It was this exasperating ache which had never ceased to make him hope for a miracle whereby he could be enabled to have all he had longed for and needed, an act of God which would destroy the British, restore to him the glory and majesty of a true Emperor, and give him back his youthful vigour to hunt and eat and make love. How often had he repeated the couplet with which in a moment of inspiration forty years ago he had greeted the news of his formal recognition as Heir Apparent:

Of what avail, O Zafar, are man's scheming and striving,
When He accords His beneficent grace, all wrongs are righted.

For a long time, he sat gazing vacantly at the familiar river-side scene below the Palace window where the pious Hindus, men and women, came for their daily prayers and ablutions. Here and there sat a priest wearing a loin-cloth rubbing sandalwood on a white stone slab to make the sweet-smelling unguent for the ritual mark on the foreheads of the devout. The flower-vendor sat with heaps of rose and marigold petals and jasmine flowers. The worshippers took their floral offering in *daunas*, cups made of folded leaves, paying for them in cowrie shells or copper *paisas*. The bathers entered the water, the men in diminutive loin cloths and the women draped in their cotton saris. The King's eyes suddenly caught a young woman emerging from the river, her wet clothes clinging to her tight, perfectly proportioned body and accentuating its provocative contours. She bent her head to one side and began squeezing water out of the long dark coil of her hair. The slow rise and fall of her tumescent breasts made more pronounced by the wet sheath of her sari and the exciting swell of her buttocks, held the old King spell-bound. Almost unconsciously he began searching for words and images to capture the shape and rhythm of beauty incarnate in these

more than perfect proportions and in the gentle swaying of her hips as she allowed the water to drip away. He began to feel a familiar tingling, a sensation of tautness in his abdomen and groin. Far away across the river he saw wisps of smoke rising and wafting across the horizon. Some herdsmen lighting a fire, thought Bahadur Shah. He recollected a Hindi couplet:

'From the river bank a column of smoke is rising.
Ah me, something is happening,
Can they be burning the bier of him whose love made me renounce the world?'

He pronounced the lilting words of the Hindi lines with a wistful pathos, and then shook himself out of the inexplicable gloom in which he seemed to be sinking. The night had been an unpleasant one, hot and close. It had succeeded an unusually hot day when from dawn to midnight a scorching *loo* had blown with a slow devouring insistence. The residents of the city of Delhi had invoked God's peace and exclaimed that the Day of Judgement had arrived, for the sun seemed to have come down to a height of a spear and a quarter. Zauq had said that the heat was grilling men's livers to *kabab*. Bahadur Shah had sat all day in his chamber with its doorway enclosed in *khas khas* on which his attendants unceasingly poured water, while near his couch, a relay of fan-bearers kept up a steady cool breeze. He had not fasted. Indeed, ever since his serious illness four years ago, he had given up fasting on the advice of his hakims. He said his prayers and spent the holy month thinking pious thoughts, hoping that the Merciful One would forgive him the sin of omission. He had not slept well and he felt tired, but the dawn had brought a respite, and from the window an occasional breath of air cooled by its passage over the Jamuna acted like a soothing balm to his eyes.

Once again he began thinking of his shortcomings, his incapacity to rule, his old age and the failure of his destiny. Was it God's will that it should be thus,

or had he failed to grasp the opportunities which God had placed in his path? Had he lacked initiative, determination, a wide vision and the ability to command respect? What did people think of him? Did they look upon him as an unfortunate victim of destiny or did they think there was something essentially hollow and sham in his kingship? He was familiar with the saying, "The people belong to God, the country to the King, but the Company Bahadur gives the orders." Yes, indeed, the Company Bahadur was so deeply entrenched in all the affairs of the country that the King counted for nothing. The people could not be happy about this state of affairs. They must feel oppressed by the white man's rule. It was true that *begar*, the system of forcing men to work for less than their food and drink, the requisitioning of private property without compensation, the laying waste of the countryside by marching troops, had always been normal features of Indian life. But there was something so calculated, so ruthless, so insidiously destructive about the British methods that an increasing measure of resentment and hostility against the company's agents had begun to be felt. Lord Dalhousie's vast and rapid annexations had exacerbated the people's sentiments. They realised that the Company Bahadur had dropped the pretence of fair dealing and justice, and was determined to disregard the treaties and laws it had promised to uphold, and proceed with the complete conquest and subjugation of the country. This was amply demonstrated by the annexation of Oudh and the deposition of the *Vizir* just fifteen months ago. There were sudden and quickly suppressed protests by groups of sepoys. The ruthlessness with which these minor mutinies were dealt with had filled the King with impotent rage. All kinds of rumours were rife. Recurrent signs of discontent in the army were spreading northwards, and it was said that the sepoys had burnt down houses and attacked their white officers. In Delhi, people had begun to talk of a Russian

invasion. It was whispered that the King had asked the Shah of Persia to send armed help to fight the British. Of course, this was utterly false, and Bahadur Shah could not help wondering that his innocent act in allowing Sidi Kambar, his negro slave, to proceed on a pilgrimage to Mecca, had been construed as an attempt to call for a military *coup* against the Company Bahadur. There was a mysterious circulation of chappatis of which news was brought to the King by one of his *daroghas* who said that a man from a village across the Jamuna had brought two small rather thick chappatis and handed them to one of the sepoys in the Cantonment. The *darogha* said he had heard this from the police *kotwal* who had been asked by the *havildar* to trace the villager. The villager had disappeared, and no one could establish his identity. But nobody in Delhi showed concern over these happenings. There was peace in the city, life went on its normal gay round. There were the usual processions to gather and delight the multitude. Buying and selling took place as briskly as ever. And then, in the month of March, a notice was found pasted on the front wall of the Jama Masjid. It purported to come from the Shah of Persia and was addressed to the Muslims of Delhi, exhorting them to unite and fight the alien intruder and usurper. Every help would be furnished by their co-religionists from across the seas. The notice had been torn down under the orders of the Resident, but reports of it were brought to the King by several persons who claimed to have read it. Hasan Askari had spoken to the King at great length about the consequence of this notice and the other happenings. He had prophesied a change, an *inqilab*, a revolution in the country.

The small wisps of smoke on the other side of the river had multiplied and a thick black column was now raising up and darkening the eastern sky. This was certainly not a cowherd burning a few twigs to light his *hooka*. Bahadur Shah was about to clap his hands

to summon an attendant when Mir Fateh Ali rushed in, and with a respectful *salaam*, pointed to the column of smoke. The King nodded to indicate that he had already observed the unusual feature and said: "Send a horseman to find out what has happened."

Mir Fateh Ali hurried out of the Suman Burj and issued a command to the horsemen waiting below the Palace wall. Two of them galloped away. A strange premonition, foreboding evil took possession of Bahadur Shah. The British had planned some new and vicious blow to strike him. He rose from his seat and taking up his walking stick, began to pace up and down the marble floor of the Suman Burj. He re-read the inscription above the arch of the doorway:

Beware, oh unhappy one whose feet are fettered,
and whose heart is padlocked.
Beware you, whose eyes are sewn up and whose
feet are bogged in mud.
You design to travel westward and are going
toward the East
O traveller in the contrary direction, beware of
the journey's perils.

He heard the sound of hurrying feet in the courtyard below and the exchange of excited voices speaking in quick harsh tones. The clamour became louder. Suddenly a cry rose from the tumult of angry voices invoking the King's help, "*Dohai Padsha ki.*" An attendant came and stood trembling before the King for a long moment.

"What is happening?" Bahadur Shah asked. "Who is making this noise?"

"Refuge of the World, a trooper has come from Meerut. He says that the Company Bahadur's sepoys have revolted and killed their European officers and their families. They want to fight the British in Delhi."

Bahadur Shah was overcome by a sudden undefined fear. He felt he was, at last, standing in the presence of Destiny, but the face of Destiny was hidden from him. By some strange and inexplicable

process, his hopes and desires were drained out of him, and his only feeling was an awareness of fear, a great, big, enveloping fear from which he wanted to escape. His knees and his legs felt weak and he sat down on the *masnad* from which he had watched the eastern sky coming alive with dawn and observed the tantalizing shape of the young bather. The girl was no longer in view. The river-bank was deserted. He heard the sound of horses' hoofs striking the firm dry earth below the Palace walls. He must go and talk to Zeenat Mahal. She would comfort and soothe him and lift this intolerable burden of fear from his head. But before he went to his private apartments he must call the Commandant of the Palace Guards and tell him to protect the Palace, look after the safety of the inmates and see that he and the other British people were safe. For, if the Commandant were killed by these mad men from Meerut, who would look after him, his Queen and his children. He must call Ghulam Abbas, his vakil and lawyer, on whom he could rely and send him to fetch Captain Douglas. He must also send for Hakim Ahsanullah Khan and ask for his advice.

Captain Douglas tried to reassure the King. He knew nothing beyond what Ghulam Abbas had told him. He said the trooper's story was utterly false, there could be no question of a revolt at Meerut and he would send the riotous group away, and if need be, arrest them. He asked the King to order the gate under the Suman Burj to be opened, so that he could go and speak to the men disturbing the King's peace. The tumult had by now increased, and an attendant came and said that more men had been seen coming across the bridge, and some of them had even entered the Palace through Salimgarh.

Captain Douglas shook his head, and in a voice from which he could not altogether eliminate the note of accusation, said:

"Ah, Your Majesty, this gate always remained closed till on Your Majesty's insistent demands the

Resident gave orders to unlock it and leave it open at the Royal discretion. But have no fear, I shall attend to everything."

He made a bow and prepared to leave. But, panic seized the King, and standing up, he caught hold of the Commandant's arm and pulled him back from the door.

"I won't let you go," he almost shouted. "You will be killed, you will be shot and cut into pieces by these miscreants. You don't know how mad they can be. You are unarmed and they have guns and swords and bayonets. I will not allow you to burden my shoulder with the sin of your murder."

Bahadur Shah's terror which had seemed puerile and unreasonable now infected Captain Douglas, and he allowed himself to be persuaded. Saying that he was obliged to obey His Majesty's commands, he took leave of the King and hurried back to his quarters. Bahadur Shah also went to his apartments to seek the solace of his Queen and concubines. But hardly had he had time to sit down and relate to Zeenat Mahal the strange happenings of the morning when a greatly agitated maid-servant rushed in and said that terrible things were happening in the Palace, and the Commandant Bahadur had sent his jemadar to call Hakim Sahib and Vakil Ghulam Abbas, and both of them had gone running to the Commandant's quarter. Sepoys and cavalrymen had come into the Palace and were standing in the courtyard below the Audience Hall and clamouring to see the King.

"What do they want of me?" asked Bahadur Shah. Fresh fears took possession of him. Had the sepoys really risen in revolt, and had they come to make a prisoner of him as the Marathas had imprisoned Shah Alam, or were they going to maim him and ultimately kill him? What a mad world it was and what mad times were coming to him in his old age.

"I don't know, Refuge of the World," the slave replied. "They keep on shouting and I couldn't make

out all they said. One of them shouted *'Padshah salamat ki dohai.'* The others repeated *'Padshah salamat, Padshah salamat.'* The *darogha* told me to tell Your Majesty. He says they won't go unless you speak to them. They want to have *darshan* of their King."

Bahadur Shah felt less like a king than he had ever felt at any time in his life. He was overcome by a paralysing weakness. Even to rise from his couch entailed an effort beyond his powers. In this state of fear, uncertainty and indecision, Zeenat Mahal tried to give him strength and an immediate purpose.

"Refuge of the World," she said, "Go to them. If what I have been hearing is true, they mean no harm to you. They have raised the cry of *'dohai'* and you cannot disregard it. Allah wants you to answer it." Turning to the slave girl she said, "Tell the *darogha* the Refuge of the World will grant the favour of his audience to the sepoys in a few moments."

Zeenat Mahal sent for a flagon of chilled sherbet for the King. She spoke to him of Allah's munificence in endowing him with all the royal attributes and virtues and reminded him of his own couplet:

Of what avail, O Zafar, are man's scheming and striving,
When He accords His beneficent grace, all wrongs are righted.

She asked him to wait till Ahsanullah Khan and Ghulam Abbas had brought their report, and then accompanied by them, he should go and hear what the sepoys had to say.

It was not long before a message came that Ahsanullah and Ghulam Abbas were waiting outside the private apartments and craved audience of the King. Bahadur Shah rose from his couch and with the help of his stick, walked slowly to the outer chamber. The Hakim made a quick obeisance and began speaking at once:

"Refuge of the World, the sepoys and cavalrymen

from Meerut are playing havoc in the Palace and in the city. We found Captain Douglas in a state of panic. He has sprained his foot and is unable to move. A gentleman is lying in his room bleeding from a sabre wound. Captain Douglas says the sepoys have killed many white men in the city. He wants Your Majesty to send two palanquins with bearers immediately to bring the English ladies from his house and place them under the Queen's protection. Fraser Commissioner Sahib also came in and asked for two of Your Majesty's guns. I have taken the liberty of complying with the requests of Captain Douglas and Fraser Sahib."

The King sighed deeply and said, "You have done well."

The noise from the courtyard increased and two of the palanquin-bearers sent to Captain Douglas' apartments, came rushing and prostrated themselves before the King. They began relating their story.

"*Hazur*, everyone has been killed, slaughtered. The Commandant Sahib went with the Commissioner Sahib to Calcutta Gate and while we were arranging the palanquin to bring the *memsahibs* here, a crowd of sepoys rushed into the house and slaughtered everyone inside. They rushed away towards the Lahore Gate shouting and waving their sabres and bayonets. We left the palanquin and ran. In the way someone told us that Commandant Sahib and the Commissioner Sahib had been attacked and killed at the Calcutta Gate."

Ahsanullah and Ghulam Abbas led the King to the Audience Hall. As soon as the rabble in the courtyard saw the decrepit, old and white-bearded King wearing the royal emblem on his turban, they poured out a chorus of loud and confused cries. Some brandished their weapons. Some bowed low to pay their homage. Others shouted *dohai dohai dohai* in sharp strident tones as if they were being tortured. Bahadur Shah heard someone at the back crying *'Padshah salamat, Long live the King'*. The sun was now well up

in the sky and was pouring down all the heat of a clear cloudless May day. A heavy nauseating smell of sweat rose from the courtyard and assailed the King's nostrils. He raised his perfumed sleeve to signal silence and let it rest against his nose for a long moment.

"Ask them what they require of us," he said to Ahsanullah.

Ahsanullah addressed the crowd: "His Majesty has commanded me to ask you why you have come here. *Hazur* deigns to say that you have done grievous wrong. He did not call you and did not order you to do all the wicked things that have been reported to him. He desires that two of your officers come forward and make their submission to him."

Two uniformed cavalry officers on horseback rode forward, and halted just below the Audience Hall. They saluted and one of them said:

"Refuge of the World, you are the King of the Faith and of the whole world. God has made you lord of twenty-two provinces. The whole of Hindustan obeys you and the people of Hindustan are deemed your subjects. We, too, are your humble and obedient servants."

The speaker looked at his companion for approval and when he in turn, nodded assent, resumed his address. It was not a prepared speech, but intensity of feeling lent eloquence to the officer's tongue. Whenever he stopped, his companion continued. The King listened on in silence. "Whenever any proclamation is made, it is always said the people belong to God, the country to the King but the Company Bahadur issues the orders. The English people are ruling the country on your behalf as your Agents. We have come to plead before you, and we seek justice. We were employed by the British. We risked our lives to conquer the country for them from Calcutta upto Kabul and helped the British to establish their rule. With our help, the British have taken possession of

the whole of India. They brought no army from England. This conquest was our work, the work of the Indian army. We were given medals in recognition of our services. But now, when the whole of India has been conquered, the British are becoming unjust and are interfering with our religion. They want to convert the people to Christianity and they are beginning with the army. That is why they have given us a cartridge which can be loaded only after it has been bitten by the teeth. The cartridge is greased with animal fat, the fat of cows and pigs. Hindus and Muslims alike have agreed to disobey this order. The Hindus suspect it is cow's fat and the Muslims think that it is pig's fat. That is why we disobeyed the order and the dispute has increased. For four months now the dispute has been going on and there have been committees and discussions. It has been planned that the entire army should give up service and if there is more trouble, there will be a universal uprising in India. The British decided to enforce their orders at Meerut and a whole regiment was lined up to face cannon and guns. They were ordered to load their cartridges. When our officers declined, they were given the order a second time. Again, the order was disobeyed. We were then ordered to throw down our arms. We did so. We were ordered to dismount from the horses. We did so. The officers were ordered to stand apart from the soldiers. So, eightyfour of us stood aside. We were handcuffed; we did not protest. We were then sent to jail. On this there was a sudden revolt. The women began to taunt the soldiers. They were the wives of those who were put into prison. They offered us their bangles to wear and said that if *they* were given the weapons they would get the officers released. This excited the soldiers and inflamed them. It was then decided to storm the jail and set the officers free. This accordingly happened. The jail was broken into and all the eighty-four officers were set free. Their handcuffs and fetters were

cut and thrown off. All the prisoners who were criminals in the jail were also released. There was a great deal of exchange of fire, and all night we fought with the white soldiers. In the morning we left for Delhi. We have travelled thirty miles and arrived here. We want the King's blessings."

Bahadur Shah was deeply moved by what the officers had related. During the whole of their address, the multitude below had remained silent. When the officers had finished, some of the sepoys in the front line began to plead in quiet respectful tones begging the King to bless them, accept their homage and command them as a King commands his subjects. Bahadur Shah felt a glow of pride and satisfaction running through his body and tingling his spine and limbs. His age and weakness seemed to be dropping away from him, but he could not rid himself of the fear which had taken possession of him and was maintaining a firm hold upon his entire being. This disorderly, bedraggled crowd of men standing before him in strange disarray was not the army he had dreamed of. These men, some in uniform, some in plain clothes, torn and stained, some in tatters like beggars or low ruffians, hungry, undisciplined, without adequate arms, without a plan or purpose, could not restore him to the glory of Timur and Akbar. What could he give them out of his empty coffers? What could he mean to them in his old and decaying state? Long years of utter frustration had brought him to a point where he had ceased to have any sustained feeling beyond a sense of extreme weariness. His moments of enthusiasm when his old hopes and yearnings filled him with a sudden desire for action, were nothing more than the frothing up of compensatory upsurges which were soon dissolved leaving a state of easy, pleasurable lethargy. Faced by the motley crowd demanding decision, leadership and action, he was unnerved, and his sole desire was to be left in peace, to sit in the quiet comfort of his Palace and be ministered to by an array of queens

and concubines and slave girls. Not many years of life remained to him, he told himself. Was it worthwhile commanding and leading an army in battle against the foe which had rescued his blind grandfather from the Marathas, driven out the Nawab of Oudh and on countless occasions, routed a multitude of Indian sepoys with a handful of disciplined soldiers? What hope was there for him, for these men, standing before him? Far, far better the life of a nominal King, a poet, a fakir, an old man, quietly and devoutly preparing himself to meet his Creator. He braced himself to answer the appeal of his subjects. He spoke slowly, almost feebly, and there was a note of wistful regret in his speech.

"Listen brothers, all of you who call me King. I am a poor fakir living in the fort and looking after my offspring. The Mughal rule ended a long time ago. My ancestors were indeed kings who held possession of Hindustan and ruled over the country. But for a hundred years we have not been owners except in name. My grandfather, Shah Alam, was imprisoned and blinded by Ghulam Qadir. He called the Marathas to help him and they delivered him. But they could not restore kingly power to him. Then my grandfather approached the British and made them masters of the royal household. He leased out our country to them and they paid him his expenses. So, peace came to the country and we have been living in security for more than fifty years. I am an old man now, and I do not want any disturbances or quarrels. I have no money to pay you. I have no army to help you. I have no kingdom from which I can collect revenue. I can do nothing at all. You have done wrong in shedding the blood of the British. They will punish you severely as they have always done those who rose up against them. It is not too late even now. If you agree, I can plead with them on your behalf."

The assembly in the courtyard had been gradually swelling by the arrival of fresh sepoys and many of

them elbowed forward through the throng and pushed themselves up into the *Diwan-i-Khas*. They prostrated themselves before Bahadur Shah and began wailing; "*Dohai, dohai, dohai Padshah ki.*" One of them, an officer, raised himself on his knees and extending his arms, appealed to the King:

"Refuge of the World, it is too late to open negotiations. The British have always been oppressors. They call themselves traders but they want to destroy us. They know that you are still the King of Hindustan and if you join us and give us your blessings we will put an end to their tyranny. They are traitors and must be expelled from the country." Another officer began speaking, "*Hazur,* you are the *Shahanshah-i-Hind,* the Emperor of India. All we need is your blessing. We shall not ask you for money. We shall take it from their treasury. We shall take arms and ammunitions from their magazines. God is with us and we place ourselves under your protection and guidance. Or else, we shall all be dead men."

Another added his plea: "Refuge of the World, vouchsafe to place your hand on our heads. We shall fight your fight and restore the Kingdom to you with all the Mughal glory of olden days."

From the courtyard arose cries of "*Padshah salamat,* Padshah's blessings will give us victory." Someone shouted: "Make the King sit on his throne so that he can give us the protection of his shadow." The cry of 'throne, throne,' was taken up and repeated by others. "Throne, throne, throne," they called out. "Bring the throne and make the Emperor sit on it." Another demanded to know where the throne was. Someone said the seat on which Bahadur Shah was sitting was the throne. "No, no," a courtier replied, "this is not the throne. The Peacock Throne is in the *toshakhana.*" "Exalted Presence," a shrill voice called out above the confusion of the tumult, "sit on the Peacock Throne." This was caught up and repeated by others like a chorus. The King raised his hand to command silence.

No one obeyed and what he said was heard only by a few men close to him.

"If it is your wish that I sit on the royal throne, I shall send for it. But afterwards you must disperse and put an end to all this disturbance."

From among the crowd the *darogha* struggled out, signalling to two or three others to follow him. In a short time, the shoddy and faded replica of the fabulous gem-studded throne which had been carried away by Nadir Shah 118 years previously, was brought into the *Diwan-i-Khas*. At sight of it, fresh and more vociferous cries shook the atmosphere and went reverberating through the hall and corridors of the Audience Hall. Bahadur Shah suddenly felt spent and limp as if all his vitality had seeped out of him. With the help of his stick he hobbled painfully to the royal throne and dropped on its padded seat. Leaning back, he raised his legs and folded them in his characteristic manner. The Infantry Officer who had remained all this time on his knees now rose and walked slowly upto the throne. He dropped down on his knees and bowed his head. Bahadur Shah raised his right hand and placed it for a moment on the officer's head. It was a purely reflex action on his part, an automatic movement in a ritual which he was going through, without conscious effort or a full awareness of what he was doing.

The officer was visibly moved by the King's blessing. He murmured, "*Padshah salamat,* may God give you victory," and withdrew walking backward. Another officer came forward and the ritual was repeated. He too withdrew saying, "The Exalted Presence must be victorious. Zafar, that is victory, is the *Padshah's* name." Others came forward and the ceremony was repeated a hundred times. The crowd in the courtyard now numbered over a thousand, and the noise and tumult continued unabated. With each conferment of his blessing, Bahadur Shah felt weaker and more powerless. He had a feeling that this rabble of loyal subjects was slowly drawing out his life and destroying

him. The heat was becoming oppressive, and despite the vigorous fanning of the two attendants who stood on either side of him, he felt faint and suffocated. He looked round, his eyes searching for Hakim Ahsanullah, for Vakil Ghulam Abbas, for Mahboob Ali Khan. None of them was present. They had all gone away and forsaken him, leaving him to the mercy of these murderous ruffians who had demanded rather than begged for his blessing, who were compelling him to do he knew not what. He must go away, he must rest. Zeenat Mahal must be waiting for him with her beautiful smiling face and her soft white hands to soothe him and take away this feeling of being half dead. It was impossible for him to give his blessing to everyone in the large and continuously increasing assembly.

"Where is Mahboob Ali Khan?" he asked of no one in particular. At once the fan-bearer repeated: "Refuge of the World has remembered Mahboob Ali Khan, let him be called." Mahboob Ali Khan who had been standing in the crowd came forward. He had been watching the growing fatigue of the King with anxiety. But the milling crowd had pushed him back. Now, standing in front of the crowd he announced that the Emperor was desirous of retiring to his apartments and resting. He slowly led the King away from the *Diwan-i-Khas*. For some time, the crowd of sepoys and cavalrymen continued their babble, and then some of them picketed their horses in the courtyard and lay down in the shade of the trees, others spread their beddings on the floor of the *Diwan-i-Khas* and turned it into a crowded army dormitory, reeking with the odour of their sweat and tobacco fumes. To these the stench of urine and excreta was soon added. Some of the men drifted away to other parts of the Palace while many, shouting the slogan "Death to the British," made their way to the Delhi Gate whence they poured into the European quarters in Daryaganj.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

IN HIS private apartments Bahadur Shah was welcomed by Zeenat Mahal, his daughters, Nanni Begum and Agha Begum, and his favourite concubine, Ahsraf-un-nissa who felicitated him repeatedly and thanked Allah for turning the destinies of the royal house.

"May God preserve you to defeat the *farangee* oppressor."

"May you rule over the country as your worthy ancestors did."

"The people of Delhi bless this day and thank the Almighty."

"Refuge of the World, you are the Crown of the army."

"Let no quarter be shown to the *farangees.*"

Zeenat Mahal saw the lines of strain and exhaustion on the King's face. His emaciated and slightly bent figure, his ashen grey colour and the nervous twitching of his hands filled her with anxiety. She made him lie down and sent a message to the Hakim asking him to prepare a restorative. But the King said all he wanted was a bowl of quail soup and a mango from the basket which had been received from Agra the previous day. He wanted to rest, to sleep, to forget the tumult, the noise and the stench of the scene in the *Diwan-i-Khas*, forget the rude homage paid to him by men who behaved more like bullies and trouble-makers than a band of loyal soldiers who might fight for him and win back the ancient glory of the House of Timur. He felt too weak and too tired to face the consequences of what the sepoys had made him do.

In the quiet of his chamber he realised that he had given his blessing to a rebellious mob and they would not leave him alone. Henceforth they would demand his support and active assistance, they would act in his name, they might dictate that he lead them into battle. He had no desire to engage in battle with the British or indeed with anyone. Only yesterday he had ridden his favourite horse, Domali, for over an hour and come home feeling exhilarated and delightfully exercised. This morning he had been looking forward to an excursion in the woods across the Jamuna, but now after the experience he had gone through, he felt suddenly old and effete and incapable of any physical or mental exertion. He did not want to be King Emperor, he did not want to command a rebellious army, he did not want to pitch himself against the British. The whole disastrous vista of Delhi's past history rose before his eyes and he shrank away from it, shuddering and shutting his eyes. History was going to repeat itself as it always had. His own wrongs were lashing back at him. His father had disowned him and tried to deprive him of his right to succeed to the peaceful enjoyment of an insubstantial kingship and a regularly paid pension. The British had championed his cause and he had been accepted as King and overlord even though his title and dignity were little more than nominal and maintained solely by the goodwill and pleasure of the British Government. He, in turn, had acted exactly as his father had done. He, too, had disowned his eldest son, Fakharuddin, and wanted Jawan Bakht to succeed him; and the British once his supporters, had opposed him and called him unjust and unfatherly. Why had he not learnt a lesson from the past? Fakharuddin had died and he had wept by his bedside. But his tears could not expiate the sin of disowning his own blood. And was it true that Fakharuddin had been murdered as also the three British officers who had opposed Zeenat Mahal and Jawan Bakht. These crimes had been debited against him in his heavenly account and he would have to pay for them,

though Allah knew he was not directly responsible. But was he not? How truly Sheikh Sa'adi had spoken:

If the King permits the plunder of but half an egg
His soldiers will roast on the spit a thousand fowls.

He began to pray, hoping that God would bring comfort to his tortured soul and bring sleep to his aching limbs. Zeenat Mahal was sitting by his side and trying to ease the heaviness in his head by her caresses. A maid-servant brought in a silver dish with a bowl of quail soup, and another stood by the couch with a tray of mangoes, a third entered the chamber carrying an assortment of sweets and comfits. Zeenat Mahal begged him to take a little nourishment and then go to sleep. Bahadur Shah raised himself on the *gao takia* and smiled sadly at her. Suddenly, a slave girl rushed into the room and fell at his feet exclaiming:

"Refuge of the World, I crave the gift of my life. I told him that the Exalted Presence was about to take refreshment, but he says the matter is urgent and I must inform Your Majesty at once."

"What is it?" asked Zeenat Mahal petulantly. "Who is it and why can't he wait?"

"Presence, it is Mahboob Ali Khan. He says he must have the Emperor's ears immediately."

Bahadur Shah leaned back and resigned himself to whatever calamity had been brought to his door by the eunuch.

"Present him," he said striving to impart a regal note into his feeble voice.

Mahboob Ali Khan entered with his usual heavy step. His broad beardless jaw was twitching with nervousness and his puffed face looked pale and even more puffed than before. His message burst out of him as he made his obeisance.

"Your Majesty, I crave your pardon for disturbing your rest, but a most serious situation has arisen and it is essential that I obtain Your Majesty's orders at once. A large number of English women and children have been brought into the Palace, and the sepoys from

Meerut are clamouring to slaughter them."

"Where have they come from and who brought them here?"

Mahboob Ali Khan was not sure how this strange entry had been made. His informant was a Palace attendant who had gone to his house and told him of their arrival. He had hurried to the Palace and found about forty white people, mostly women and children, many of whom were dressed in Hindustani clothes. They were huddled together near the royal kitchen on the other side of the courtyard, and their faces were frozen into masks of terror and despair. They were past weeping and pleading. A handful of sepoys, with drawn sabres, stood guard over them. He had placed them inside a room, and had ordered the soldiers to keep watch over them and let no harm come to them till the King decided how they were to be disposed of.

Bahadur Shah had no doubt about how the white prisoners were to be treated. The English took a strangely distorted view of the honour and dignity of their women. Insults and injuries offered to white women incensed them out of all proportion to the magnitude of the offence, and they were prone to lose their balance and have recourse to the most barbarous and bestial reprisals. He must be careful to keep these persons safe and not invite on himself the wrath of the English.

"Keep them safe," he said, "And let them be informed that we have spared their lives. They have thrown themselves on our mercy and we shall protect them. Such are the rules of warfare and we shall strictly observe them. See that they get adequate meals, and if any more come, treat them likewise with kindness and courtesy."

Mahboob Ali Khan promised compliance with the King's orders, but submitted that the sepoys were in an angry mood, and there was no knowing what they might do. They had tasted blood, and talked of their exploits in Meerut with so much relish that they seem-

ed to be ready for a fresh slaughter of Christians. Suddenly, Bahadur Shah lost his temper and began to shout in a high-pitched screechy voice.

"We have given the order and it must be obeyed. Tell Ahsanullah such is our pleasure and we will not be intimidated by these impertinent rebels. Why did they come to us for our royal blessing if they will not obey our commands? The Christians are to be kept safe and must be treated as enemy subjects who have sought asylum in the Palace. We shall not tolerate any excuses or evasions."

Mahboob Ali Khan quietly withdrew saying that the King's commands would be carried out with promptness and diligence. Bahadur Shah leaned back against the *gao takia* and tried to regain his composure. He was glad he had been so forthright with Mahboob Ali Khan. He must go personally to the white women and assure them of his protection. He must send a message to the Lieutenant-Governor at Agra, telling him what had happened and asking him to do whatever he considered proper. He discussed the matter with Zeenat Mahal and she entirely agreed with him, counselling him to be discreet and wary, not letting the sepoys know or feel that he entertained doubts about their ultimate victory. She was sure they would obey him, but he should not openly declare himself against them. Bahadur Shah saw the wisdom of Zeenat Mahal's advice. He remembered his grandfather's astuteness in a similar predicament. Shah Alam had asked for British help to rescue him from the Marathas; two days later he declared that he would fight them; and when the British had defeated the Marathas, he welcomed them as his benefactors and deliverers. Yes, he must send a secret message for help to Agra and maintain a discreet appearance *vis-a-vis* the rebellious sepoys and cavalrymen.

Towards dusk he called Hakim Ahsanullah and dictated a formal note to the Lieutenant-Governor at Agra, apprising him of the tragic events at Meerut and

Delhi and telling him that he and the entire royal family sought the protection of the Company Bahadur and of the British Government. He directed the Hakim to send the message with a loyal and reliable camel rider who must go with all possible speed to Agra and deliver it into the hands of the Lieutenant-Governor himself. The messenger was to be admonished to observe complete secrecy and bring a reply back without delay. This done, Bahadur Shah felt easier in mind and expressed a desire to be conducted to the place where the English women and children had been confined under guard.

He saw about thirty persons crouching inside a long and narrow room, guarded by four sepoys sitting in front of the door which was the only opening to provide egress and ingress and light and air to the room. The sepoys sat on the ground, their guns with bayonets fixed to them, lying by their side. They stood up on hearing the announcer's cry and made a low *salaam*. The King thought it imprudent to go into the room and speak to the inmates. He enquired of the sepoys if food had been served to them and conveyed to them his desire that the prisoners were to be kept safe and unharmd till further orders from him. On his way back to his apartments, he called the *darogha* of the kitchens and ordered him to send the evening meal to the prisoners from the royal kitchen.

Through the evening and late into the night, news of riots and killings in the city continued to arrive, and Bahadur Shah felt more and more distressed about the painful development of events. The sepoys from Meerut had been joined by the regiments posted in the city, and the entire unruly mob of soldiers had run amok killing Europeans and Anglo-Indians wherever they found them and looting their houses. Some of them had tried to take possession of the magazine to acquire arms and ammunitions, but the men defending it had blown it up and had themselves perished in the explosion. The people in the city thought the Russians

had come; they closed their shops and barricaded their houses. Many buildings were broken open by sepoys, and *badmashes,* the bad characters, of the city seized upon the occasion to add to the general chaos, and plundered whatever they could lay their hands on, on the pretext of ferreting out any Europeans who might be hiding or seeking shelter in Indian homes. Some more women and children, disguised as Indians or Kashmiris, sought shelter in the Palace. They were apprehended and confined with the first group of refugees. Bahadur Shah spent the night in fitful sleep, disturbed by intermittent cries of *din din.* In the middle of the night a large group of cavalrymen made a tumultuous entrance into the Palace grounds, and crowding into the courtyard, bivouaced in noisy confusion.

In the morning Hakim Ahsanullah and Mahboob Ali Khan presented themselves before Bahadur Shah, and said the situation was completely out of control, and unless he exercised his personal authority, the city would be destroyed and the inhabitants slaughtered by mad men who were behaving worse than Nadir Shah's soldiers. They said the officers of the freshly arrived regiments wanted to pay their homage to him, and the princes were desirous of associating themselves with the army in order to organise the fight against the British and prepare a plan whereby quiet and confidence might be restored in the city. They craved his permission to hold a durbar. Bahadur Shah gave his assent to the suggestion and directed that his orders be communicated to everyone concerned.

The durbar was held in the *Diwan-i-Khas.* The Peacock Throne was again brought out and placed at one end of the hall; a few carpets were hurriedly spread out and an awning put up in front of the hall. Long before the announced hour of the durbar, the hall and the courtyard in front, were crowded by army officers, sepoys and cavalrymen. A large number of men from the city had also come to attend the durbar.

The princes and officials of the Palace stationed themselves near the royal seat. The announcer's cry rang out calling upon the gathering to show "respect and honour to the Exalted Presence of Siraj-ud-din Khan, Mohammed Abu Zafar Bahadur Shah Ghazi, shadow of God on earth, Emperor of Hindustan." Everyone stood up and the confused babble was hushed. The King, led by his son, Mirza Mughal, and his councillors, Hakim Ahsanullah and Nawab Mahboob Ali Khan, walked slowly into the hall and was conducted to the throne. Despite the intense heat, the King and the courtiers were attired in the rich ceremonial robes of silk and brocade. Behind the throne, two fan-bearers toiled with massive long-handled fans made from peacock feathers. As soon as the King was seated, Mahboob Ali Khan called out that the durbar was in session. The ceremony of offering *nazrs* began. The princes and officers of the army came forward and presented their offerings one by one, swearing allegiance to him. The slow and long-drawn proceeding seemed to Bahadur Shah a meaningless and tiresome piece of play-acting. Was he really, he asked himself, the Emperor of India? Did he wield any authority over these people or was he simply a pawn in their hands, an instrument of their evil genius? Were they truly his royal subjects or were they compelling him to bless their designs, *their* decision and *their* crimes as if they had proceeded from his royal authority? Gradually, a state of insensitivity dulled his sense of fatigue and his awareness. He ceased to question if all he saw and heard was real or a strange miasma conjured up by a spiteful genie. He leaned back and closed his eyes for a moment. When he opened them again, the scene was unchanged, only another courtier was bowing before him and offering his *nazr*, a single silver rupee on a red handkerchief. He extended his hand and touched the offering in token of acceptance. The *darogha* of *nazrs* and ceremonies took the rupee, and the courtier backed away to stand in the row of gaily

attired men. Another man whom Bahadur Shah did not even know, stepped forward and made his bow. . . .

Bahadur Shah could not remember afterwards how long the durbar had remained in session, how many officers and courtiers had offered *nazrs* and craved his blessing. Vaguely, as if he saw the scene through a thick mist, he had a recollection of familiar and unknown figures moving and performing functions he could not control, though he was in some strange way, connected with every movement and every word that was said or heard. When Munir-ud-din Khan, a former Police Inspector, suddenly appeared before him, emerging out of a dark cloud, he accepted the offer of his services for keeping order in the city. He remembered that his son, Mirza Mughal, obtained from him the impression of the royal seal on a petition which raised Munir-ud-din to the status of the Governor of Delhi. Other papers were placed before him and he assented to whatever was asked of him by his sons or Ahsanullah and Mahboob Ali. He was part of a big machine which was going round and round and entangling him in its wheels. His own movements were not acts of his volition. He could not start or stop them. He did not even wish to control them. He only wished that the durbar would end, so that he could go back to his chamber.

Mirza Mughal was standing before him and asking to be placed in charge of the army. Who could be better fitted for the post of the Commander-in-Chief than his own son? Mahboob Ali Khan added his prayers in support of the prince, and said that the army officers were desirous of being led by him. It was only natural that the other princes should be appointed colonels. Mahboob Ali Khan read out an order that Ram Sahai and Diwani Mal would furnish a sum of Rs. 500 daily for purchasing meal, pulses and gram for the regiments.

When at last he left the durbar, he was utterly exhausted and had to be supported as he walked to his

apartments. Once again he reminded Mahboob Ali Khan to observe his commands regarding the safety of the European prisoners and see that no harm came to them.

The days that followed were a kind of horrible nightmare. Bahadur Shah could never have imagined that kinghood could be such a painful and frustrating experience, making him feel completely powerless and yet completely responsible for a state of chaos and crime. Reports of plunder and arson in the city continued to be brought to him, and he learnt that Delhi had been converted into a scene of brute rapine and destruction. The Palace was no longer the King's residence, the courtyards and gardens were filled with unruly soldiers and their horses. The Audience Halls were crowded with men sitting or sprawling on their beddings, smoking *hookas,* playing dice and quarrelling in raised voices. When he came out to take the air, no one showed him the respect due to an Emperor despite the *chobdar's* loudly uttered announcement of his presence. Evil-smelling and ill-clad sepoys pushed past him saying, "Make way, old man." The lawns were littered with horse-dung and burnt wood, rags, old shoes, pieces of rope, the remains of horse food, straw and heaps of stones and bricks. The sight angered him and he repeatedly asked Ahsanullah and Mahboob Ali to clear the courtyards, and asked the Commander-in-Chief to remove the army to a camp beyond the city walls. But the devastation continued. Mirza Mughal said he was issuing the necessary orders, and seated on an elephant, he personally visited the principal police stations in the city and made a proclamation that anyone found guilty of plundering would be punished, and if any shop-keeper refused to open his shop, he would be fined and imprisoned. Bahadur Shah thereupon said that he would himself go to the city and impress upon his subjects the need to remain peaceful and law-abiding. In the afternoon, seated on his favourite elephant, with prince Jawan Bakht behind

him and accompanied by two regiments of infantry with six guns, he rode in State through Chandni Chowk. He spoke to the shop-keepers urging them to open their shops and go on performing their normal business. He told them that Mirza Munir-ud-din had been appointed Governor of Delhi and he would maintain order and protect their property. The citizens flocked to pay homage to him and raised shouts of *'Padshah salamat, Khalaq khuda ki mulk Padshah ka hukum Jahan Panah ka.*" He came back to the Palace feeling elated by the experience. Hardly had he sat down when a deputation of sepoys came to him and demanded an order for the execution of the European prisoners. He refused and declared that these persons had sought his protection and he had promised them their safety. They must, therefore, on no account be harmed. Each day this demand was repeated with increasing persistence and vehemence, and each day Bahadur Shah declined to entertain it. When reports of killings of Europeans in the city were brought to him, he shook his head and said that the murderers would have to answer for their deeds on the Day of Judgment. Plundering in many parts of the city continued. The soldiers continued to infest the Palace and complained of lack of food and money. They said Ahsanullah and Mahboob Ali were playing a double game. They were withholding the sepoys' allowances of pay and clothing because they were secretly colluding with the British. Mahboob Ali who was present, swore on the Koran that he was loyal to the King and not a traitor.

The next day events took an ugly turn.

When the King came to hold his Court in the *Diwan-i-Khas*, the sepoys, led by three officers, laid before him a letter which they said bore the seals of Hakim Ahsanullah and Nawab Mahboob Ali Khan. The letter was addressed to a British officer telling

him that if the British agreed to acknowledge Jawan Bakht as Heir Apparent, they would help them to enter the city and take possession of it. The letter had been intercepted at the Delhi Gate of the city and it conclusively proved the duplicity of the King's trusted counsellors. The letter was shown to Ahsanullah and Mahboob Ali Khan. Both of them at once declared that it was a forgery, and had been prepared by their enemies. Ahsanullah took off his signet ring and threw it before his accusers. "Here is my seal," he exclaimed in tones of considerable anger, "look at it and compare it with the unclear impression on the letter which is obviously made from a counterfeit seal of gypsum. Your Majesty, I swear on the holy Koran that this document is a forgery."

Mahboob Ali Khan added his protests to the Hakim's denial and similarly offered his ring to the sepoys for examination. The sepoys made faces, sulked and withdrew. It was clear that they were not satisfied, and adhered to their belief that the King's counsellors were betraying them and setting all their efforts at nought by secretly negotiating with the British. Even before the Court had risen and within sight of the King, they surrounded the Hakim and began to threaten him with drawn swords. They declared they would kill him and hack him into small pieces if he continued in his duplicity. Some of them ran to Mahboob Ali's house, broke it open and plundered it, shouting that they were dealing with a traitor and an ally of the British. Mirza Mughal came forward and ordered the sepoys not to create a disturbance, and assured them that he would see justice done. He urged upon the King the absolute necessity of executing the European prisoners. Ahsanullah, he said, was protecting them because he hoped to deliver them into the hands of the victorious British when they entered the fort.

"The British will never win this war," he cried out, "Nobody is with them. We have every sepoy and

cavalryman in Hindustan on our side. The Nawabs and Rajahs are going to join us and some of them have already arrived. More and more people are rushing to free the country from the yoke of the British. The Nawab of Malagarh has been daily attending Your Majesty's Court, Mahmud Ali Khan of Dadri came the day before yesterday to pay his homage and offer his help. Rajah Bahadur Singh of Lucknow also came yesterday. The cavalry from Jhajjar arrived today and our numbers are being augmented everyday and every hour. The men have suffered bitterly at the hands of the British and they are entitled to claim the lives of their oppressors by way of a small recompense. I beg Your Majesty to agree."

"No, no, this is a preposterous demand. These people are under our protection, and they must, on no account, be harmed. In the Afghan War fifteen years ago, the British women who were taken prisoners were kept safe, unmolested and unharmed; they were afterwards handed over to the British. How can we be so barbarous as to betray the trust of the prisoners, and reject their cry for mercy? No, a hundred times no. We will never permit our subjects to commit such a dastardly crime. This is our final command and it must be obeyed."

Saying this, the King rose, indicating that the durbar had concluded. He was led to his apartments by Ahsanullah and Mahboob Ali Khan. A few minutes later, he heard the noise of a fresh uproar in the courtyard which gradually increased and drew near. Mirza Mughal, he was informed, craved his audience. He was standing outside accompanied by the eunuch, Basant Ali Khan and a dozen officers of cavalry and infantry. Ahsanullah was vainly trying to send the visitors away by pleading that the Emperor was tired and was resting. Bahadur Shah summoned the men and met them at the door of his apartments. Mirza Mughal and Basant Ali Khan who led the party, said that they had come to plead with the King and obtain

his orders regarding the fate of the European prisoners. The officers stood behind the two men in a threatening attitude straining to come forward and prevail upon the King. Bahadur Shah saw the menacing looks on their faces, one or two stared back at his old and tired eyes with what seemed an expression of contempt. One of them declared in a deliberate, ominously calm voice: "We shall not go until we have obtained your consent." This was said without even a semblance of humility or respect due from a subject to his King. From the courtyard beyond, the noise of angry voices continued to come. Bahadur Shah shook his head in despair and asked Mirza Mughal and Basant Ali Khan to come inside his chamber. He told them that he would never agree to the slaughter of innocent women and children. "I shall have to answer for this when I stand before my Creator on the Day of Judgement. What shall I tell Him then?"

Mirza Mughal argued that to kill the enemy in wartime was a pious deed deserving of God's approval, and for this the soldiers as well as the King would be rewarded in Paradise. The sepoys had determined to execute the prisoners, and even if their demand were refused, they would carry out their design. It would be more gracious to give royal assent to their request. He went on to argue that in this way the King would win the confidence of the army and strengthen his own position. Also, with the execution of the Europeans, the suspicions regarding the loyalty of Ahsanullah and Mahboob Ali Khan would be allayed. Bahadur Shah continued to shake his head and said: "No, no. Don't ask me to do this wicked deed." Mirza Mughal begged and pleaded and finally tried to browbeat and overawe his father. What was the point, he said, of his being the Commander-in-Chief if he could not issue a petty order like this. What was he to say to the officers waiting outside? He would lose his authority over the army if the sepoys went against his orders and killed the prisoners, for kill them they

must and would. The King should give his permission, he must, otherwise he, Mirza Mughal, would not be answerable for what might happen.

Bahadur Shah felt sick and tired. He had come to the end of his resources and lost the power to resist and assert himself. He made a last feeble attempt: "I have over and over again told you what I am convinced is the right thing. You say the sepoys will do whatever they want to do. Then why have you come to me? If they are going to kill these innocent people whatever I say, it is needless for me to say anything at all."

"Then Your Majesty will not forbid them?"

"What is the use of my forbidding anyone who will not listen to me?" With a deep sigh Bahadur Shah leaned back against the *gao takia* and closed his eyes.

Mirza Mughal and Basant Ali Khan exchanged glances and making a low obeisance, stepped back out of the door and faced the officers and sepoys waiting in the antechamber.

"The King has given his permission," Basant Ali Khan said. He raised his hand to caution silence. "His Majesty is very tired and is desirous of resting." The group of soldiers quickly shuffled out and hurried to the courtyard where they announced in a loud voice that the Emperor had ordered the execution of the enemy Christians. The message was conveyed to the Royal guards by Mirza Mughal and Basant Ali Khan.

An hour later, the report of the executions was brought to Bahadur Shah. As he heard the details of the gruesome massacre, he wrung his hands in anguish. A large crowd of sepoys had gone to the prison room and asked the prisoners to come out because they were to be removed to another place. "The women began to wail, and cry that they were going to be slaughtered as the guardsmen had often told them. But the sepoys and Palace attendants swore that they meant no harm to them and the prisoners would be certainly taken to better quarters where they would be more comfortable.

They then came out and a cordon was thrown round them and they were conducted and dragged to the big peepul tree near the tank in the courtyard. There they were killed, everyone of them, and their bodies were placed on carts, taken down to the riverbank and thrown into the Jamuna. The sepoys fired two guns as a token of their joy, and there is much satisfaction among the Palace servants who are celebrating the occasion by holding a feast."

Bahadur Shah shook his head. A cry of pain burst out of him: "Oof, they are not men but horrible beasts. Were they not afraid of the wrath of God? They will not be forgiven. God will punish them for this."

For a long time he sat thus shaking his head and repeating the verse he had composed many years ago:

O Zafar, do not deem him man, howsoever, endowed with wisdom and wit
Who remembers not God in his hour of abundance, who fears not God in his moment of passion.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE MASSACRE of the white women and children made a violent impact on Bahadur Shah. He brooded over the ghastly event for several days alternately blaming himself for not making a more determined stand against the dastardly demand of his officers and seeking consolation in the thought that the decrees of Fate are inexorable and that it had been beyond his power to avert the tragedy. But he could not continue to look at the looting and killing, the hooliganism and the utter lack of discipline of his men and soldiers as if he were a mere spectator. He had accepted their profession of loyalty and oaths of allegiance and he had given them his blessing. The mutinous officers and sepoys were acting in his name and under his assumed authority. But after acknowledging him their King and Commander-in-Chief, they had discarded the very notion of discipline and obedience, and gone forth to pillage, burn and kill. They were experiencing a novel sensation, a new and hitherto unfelt sense of exhilaration in shedding the blood of their white officers and dishonouring their womenfolk. Towards him they showed not the slightest respect. They swarmed all over his Palace and gardens laying their beds on the marble terraces bivouacing on the lawns, tethering their horses in his cherished flower beds, despoiling the trees and the ornamental bushes he had tended over the years and depositing filth everywhere.

He felt no urge of ambition or the desire to fight and regain the lost glory of the Mughal Empire. He was too old and too infirm in body and mind to sustain

a struggle against the mighty British forces. Would it not be wiser, he often asked himself, to retire into peaceful oblivion and spend the remaining few days of his life in prayer and meditation. And yet retreat was impossible. Something inside him clung to a forlorn hope, to the dim but unforgotten memory of the dreams of his youth. And when he felt the force of the torrent which was ineluctably carrying him forward, he began to believe that it was the hand of Allah which was using him as an instrument of His will. He was old and weak in body, he had no experience of warfare, but he could not retrace his steps. He must go on. There was just no alternative. He must put his faith in Allah and let himself be guided by His hand. At a late hour he retired to bed. Lying down he offered a prayer and tried to compose himself to sleep telling himself that in the morning he must call a conference of the princes, his army officers and civilian administrators.

The morning had not yet begun to generate the furnace heat of mid-May, when Bahadur Shah, preceded by the loud and pompous shouts of the official announcer, calling upon everyone to be vigilant, respectful and expectant, made his way to the *Diwan-i-Khas* where a group of about forty men awaited him. They stood up and made their obeisance, touching the ground with the right hand and raising it to the forehead seven times in succession. The princes, Mirza Mughal, Kochak Sultan, Khair Sultan, Mendhu and Abubakr stood in front. Behind them were half a dozen *salateens* of lesser rank and importance. Hakim Ahsanullah Khan, and Mahboob Ali Khan and Basant Ali, eunuches, stood apart in a group. The newly appointed Governor, Muniruddin Khan and a dozen army officers, formed another group. Ghulam Abbas, the King's special attendant Mohand Lal, Special Secretary, two scribes and a bunch of *chobdars* completed the assembly. Bahadur Shah acknowledged the homage of his subjects and sat down on the throne. He began

to them in a low clear voice. He said he had called them to seek their assistance in carrying out the task which God had chosen to entrust to him. They had sought his blessing and promised their allegiance and obedience. They must do their duty towards their sovereign and towards God. Raising his voice and speaking in a more earnest tone, he said:

"You know very well that the state of our capital is fast deteriorating. There is no peace and no order anywhere. Shops and houses have been closed, business has altogether closed, and the sepoys who should be welcomed by the people as their saviours and destroyers of the enemy usurper, are held in fear and hatred. Nothing is safe from their marauding hands. The army should protect and not desolate and plunder. It is for the officers to restrain their men from the commission of these improprieties. It is not enough to have a Commander-in-Chief and colonels and subedars. They must enforce discipline and order in those who are under their command. Our ancestors, Amir Timur and Babar, successfully contended against vastly superior numbers because their men were disciplined. When Nadir Shah received a report that some *badmashes* of Delhi had assaulted his men, he merely unsheathed his sword, and rivers of blood began to flow through the streets of the city and when Ahmed Shah went to him begging for mercy for his white beard, Nadir Shah put his sword back into its scabbard and the slaughter of innocents immediately ceased. Have our officers and sepoys no regard for their King and his white beard?" He paused and looked round at the assembly of men, standing silent, with bowed heads like guilty persons receiving their sentence. Bahadur Shah straightened himself with a quick movement, raised his chin and said in a sharp authoritative tone:

"Mirza Mughal, we order and admonish you to put an instant end to the misconduct of the soldiers under your command. We shall institute an administrative court with six military officers and six civilians.

We shall appoint judges and magistrates to try and punish wrong-doers. Anyone found guilty of plundering or stealing will have his nose and ears cut off. The Administrative Court will make arrangements for procuring and distributing foodstuff and other provisions. They will raise funds by borrowing money from merchants. If need be we shall start a mint, and strike as many silver coins as are needed. The soldiers must all be removed to camps outside the city walls, and it will be their duty to keep the marauding gujars in order. We have received many complaints of their misdeeds..."

Bahadur Shah went on speaking, urged by a strange new strength which astonished his listeners. He moved from one subject to another, pleading, persuading, admonishing, pouring out his oratory now with the calm deliberation of a lawyer arguing his case, and then suddenly lashing his audience for the slights and indignities he had suffered at the hands of the arrogant indisciplined sepoys. With a final outburst, he brought his address to a close and leaned back against the large *gao takia* behind him.

The assembly stayed silent for a long moment, cowed down by the spell of his fierce challenge. Mirza Mughal was the first to speak:

"The shadow of the Almighty has spoken the truth. Matters are, indeed, in a chaotic state and the condition of the city is parlous. I give Your Majesty my solemn promise that I and the officers under my command will, henceforth, not be wanting in the performance of our duties. I crave Your Majesty's leave to confer with my officers upon our military plan of action, after which we shall seek Your Majesty's audience in the morning."

There were murmurs of approval. An officer stepped forward and said that the army was short of ammunition: "We have a sufficiency of arms. Every sepoy who comes brings his gun, but the ammunition is soon exhausted. There is enough saltpetre in the

soil beyond the Jamuna, and it is very easy to manufacture powder. We await Your Majesty's order to set up a gun-powder factory. We shall then attack the British forces and vanquish them."

The next few days were a period of feverish activity in the Palace. Bahadur Shah strove to forget his age, his physical weakness, his sense of despair and his desire to retire to a life of quiet meditation and devotion to God. He sent friendly messages to the rajahs and nawabs of neighbouring territories. He took the defence of the city of Delhi under his personal control, and went out to inspect the disposition of troops. He urged upon the Governor the supreme importance of maintaining order if the campaign against the British had to have any hope of success. He paid frequent visits to different parts of the city to observe conditions for himself. When he received a complaint about the inadequacy of provisions for the army, he summoned Mirza Munir-ud-din to appear before him and explain the default. He called the grain merchants and admonished them, threatening them with grave consequences if they failed to supply foodgrains or charged exorbitant prices. He sent sepoys to protect the food stores from the misdeeds of *badmashes*. He deputed Mirza Mughal to keep order in the disturbed areas. He sent his grandson, Abubakr, to punish the *gujars* who were reported to be looting and plundering shops and houses in Subzi Mandi. When he found that Munir-ud-din was unable to cope with the situation, either because of lack of integrity or through incompetence, he removed him from the office of Governor and appointed Qazi Faizullah Khan in overall charge of law and order in the city. When he heard that a cargo of boats, laden with provisions, had arrived for a local merchant, he ordered the immediate requisitioning of the entire supply. He held conferences and discussions several times a day. He read petitions,

called for reports, passed oral and written orders many of which were personally autographed by him. He went to Salimgarh to make a detailed inspection of the fortifications and spoke to the soldiers exhorting them to perform their duties with diligence and courage. He called for volunteers to enlist under his banner. He wore himself out talking, discussing, planning, issuing orders, signing documents and worrying, worrying, worrying about the futility of it all.

He felt tired and spent. As he lay on his bed, he kept repeating his name Zafar, Zafar, Zafar. Where was the victory he had hoped for and striven for? He had reposed his trust in God and had not spared any pains to do what he thought was his duty towards Allah and his people. But nothing had come of all his labours, of all his faith. On every side there was incompetence, indiscipline, failure, defeat. What could he, single-handed, achieve? But, he must go on. There was no going back, no retreat, no capitulation possible. He must go through the motions of kinghood, perform the daily drill, go on holding conferences, hearing complaints and issuing orders. This was his destiny, this was the will of Allah, and whether it led to victory and an empire or to defeat and death, he must submit to the decree of fate with philosophic resignation. His limbs were reluctant to move. Ambition was completely drained out of him, and he felt like a puppet who must be moved and activated by an outside agency. His maidservants waited with basin and towel and trays of eatables. Zeenat Mahal's slave girl came and said that the Begum was desirous of paying her respect to His Majesty. Hakim Ahsanullah Khan was waiting in the *Diwan-i-Khas* with a bundle of important papers. The members of the administrative court were in attendance. Several petitioners from the city were praying for an audience.

He raised himself with an effort, performed his

ablutions, said his prayers and sent word to Zeenat Mahal. She, at any rate, was a source of cheer and comfort to him. In seventeen years she had aged. But, there was still about her person a soft beauty, a glow, a seductive charm which he found irresistible. The love-making of younger women no longer satisfied him. Their intimate contact made him tingle for a moment or two, and then left him with a sort of incomplete and unsatisfied feeling. But Zeenat Mahal's caresses soothed him and went deep into his very entrails. Sometimes, in his dimly lit chamber she would come to him and lie by his side speechless, letting her bare body rest against his. She would place her arm round him and move it gently over his emaciated back. He would feel reinvigorated and whisper: "Begum, Begum, Begum" in her ears till soft enveloping waves of happiness passed over his whole body and smothered him in a gentle, comforting mist of euphoric oblivion.

"Begum," he said to her in a voice full of tenderness, "we feel tired this morning. The fulfilment of the task which Allah has entrusted to us is proving beyond the powers of an old man of eighty-two. But we are thankful to Him that He has been merciful enough to give us a consort like you. We cannot tell you, Begum, how much courage and strength your love and support have given us. May the blessing of Allah be upon you."

"Refuge of the World, I pray to Allah a hundred times a day that your labours may be rewarded with success. There are times when I am overcome by despair, and sorrow gnaws at my heart. I then think that perhaps we should abandon this struggle, for the British are so powerful that they seem to have the Almighty on their side. But, then I see my error, I beseech Allah to forgive me, for it is *Iblees* who is assisting the *ferangees* and surely, surely, Allah is on our side."

"Amen, a hundred times Amen, Begum. May Allah

keep you safe."

Bahadur Shah stood up, and upon a sudden impulse, embraced Zeenat Mahal, holding her tight in his frail arms and resting his dry lips on her soft rounded cheek. He disengaged himself reluctantly, and taking his stick, walked out and made his way to the *Diwan-i-Khas.*

It was an unhappy day for Bahadur Shah for there was an endless recital of complaints and petitions, alleging all manners of hardships, tyrannous acts, victimisation and the suffering of innocents at the hands of the royal princes and officers of the army. The conditions in the city were unbearably chaotic, and as the *Peshkar* read petition after petition, Bahadur Shah began to despair of ever being able to set matters right.

Petition of Sayad Abdullah, priest at the shrine of Hazrat Sheikh Mohammed Chishti.

The whole of the autumn crop of sugarcane, *chari,* etc. has been totally devastated. And more than this, the very implements of agriculture, ploughs, the woodwork on the wells, have all been carried away by the soldiers. In these circumstances, certainly the rents cannot be realised, and as the revenue of the village has been assigned as an endowment to support the expenses of the alms-house under your petitioner's management, he depends upon your royal kindness and consideration, and trusts such arrangements will be adopted as will ensure that no soldiers shall cause loss to the agriculturists of this village.

Petition of Rattan Chand, Superintendent of the Royal Gardens and Private Estates of the King.

The troopers quartered in Chandni Chowk, have picketed their horses in front of the shops owned by Your Majesty. Many of the attendants have, in consequence, vacated their shops and gone away, and those that remain are ready to follow the same course from dread of the troopers. Much loss of rent as well as

damage to the shops which were recently plastered, is occurring.

Petition of Shiv Dayal and Shadi Ram, Merchants.

Great mobs of people go daily to the shops of your slaves, near Kashmere Gate and indulge in the most riotous proceedings. Sometimes, they bring the Chief Police Officer of the City, at other times, the troopers accuse your petitioners of sending supplies to the British. Be it manifest to Your Majesty that we are the hereditary and home-born slaves of your illustrious house, and the eaters of your salt. The riotous conduct of the soldiery will bring about our total ruin and impoverishment. We pray, therefore, that our shops may be placed under lock and key of the State.

Petition of Mubarak Shah, Chief Police Officer of the City.

Mubarak Shah, Chief Police Officer of the City, reports that at noon yesterday, a large crowd of Infantry soldiers assembled and broke into the house of Alopi Prasad and Ruramal, Khatris, on the pretext of searching for Europeans. I immediately despatched my assistant to prevent excesses on the part of bad characters and sent forth aid, a little later. The assistant came back and reported that he had been sent away by the officer of the Regiment who told him that there was no necessity for his presence. I have just now heard that no suspicious property and no Europeans were found, but nevertheless, the soldiers have arrested the two owners of the house and taken them away. The proceedings in the case were altogether at variance with the rules and usage according to which a search should be conducted, and by such a proceeding, Your Majesty's subjects are aggrieved and oppressed.

Petition of Sayad Mohammed, Fakir

The soldiers of the 9th Regiment of Native Infantry quartered close to Kashmere Gate, are destroy-

ing houses. Several tenements forming a square, some of brick or stone and some of mud or unbaked bricks and belonging to Fakirs, are situated in the locality. The aforesaid soldiery have already dug out and taken away doors and door-frames. They are now demolishing the roofs. As Your Majesty dispenses justice to all, your petitioner seeks Your Majesty's favour.

Petition of Pir Baksh, Tinker.

Your slave had a Tinker's shop within the precincts of the Palace at which the kitchen utensils and other articles of the royal household were tinned. Now the Infantry soldiers have destroyed the forge and taken possession of your slave's house. They decline to vacate it. Your slave depends on Your Majesty's generous favour and consideration to issue an order that the shop may be vacated so that your slave may resume his occupation of tinning the royal utensils.

Petition of Jugal Kishore and Shiv Prasad, Merchants.

On paying, agreeably to Your Majesty's orders, Rs. 1,200 into the Royal Treasury, we obtained a document under your special signature assuring us that we should, for the future, have full immunity from all vexation and annoyance at the hands of the functionaries of the State, from the Princes Royal of illustrious descent, the soldiers of the army and all others. Notwithstanding all this, some troopers bent upon plunder, came daily to your slave's house in the name of the Princes and wished to take our lives or make us prisoners. Left without other choice, we have been sitting concealed for the last few days, while our servants and retainers, subjected to every grievance and hardship, have not known what to do. Denied ingress to and egress from our house, we have been rendered homeless, as it were, and the privacy of our families has been completely ruined. If the Princes Royal, delegated to protect the subjects of the State and the poor, begin

themselves to plunder and oppress, where then can there be any safety for the subjects? Your Majesty's goodness, clemency and justice being equal to Nowsherwan's, we expect that a written order will be addressed to such of the Royal Princes of illustrious ancestry namely, His Highness the Lord of the World, Mirza Mohammed Mughal Bahadur, Mirza Khair Mohammed Sultan Bahadur, Mirza Mohammed Abu-bakar Bahadur, Mirza Mohammed Abdulla Bahadur and others to the effect that in future no soldiers of the Infantry or Cavalry be permitted to go to your slave's house and commit acts of aggression there, and that the Military Guard at present stationed there be removed, because lawless characters of the city take advantage of the guard being changed to plunder your slave's property.

Petition of Saligram, Proprietor of Bullock Trains.

Your slave's bullock train for passengers and parcels has been running between Delhi and Mathura. When the revolt of the troops occurred, all my arrangements were deranged and one of my wagons which was coming from Mathura stopped at the Arab Sarai owing to the disturbed state of the country. The persons in charge of the wagon declined to be responsible for its safety. Your slave depends on Your Majesty's kindness and consideration to allow him the aid of a peon for bringing the wagon in safety from the Arab Sarai.

Petition of Dundi Khan, Farmer of Purana Qila.

Your petitioner is a poor farmer and has of old been Your Majesty's subject. He has claims against the tenants on account of the autumn crop, but cannot realise his dues. He appeals to Your Majesty's favour and goodness for an order to be issued to the officers stationed in the Old Fort to have your petitioner's money realised, so that he may pay the instalments of the royal revenue. Your slave further submits that if

he is so authorised, he will collect the revenue of the hamlets connected with the Old Fort, according to the records of the Village Accountant and will bring it to the Royal Presence. By the money thus reaching the Royal Treasury, your slave will attain distinction. Furthermore, your slave submits that when he asks the farmers to carry on the sowing and agricultural operations in order to provide for future needs, they do not heed his injunctions, and if some of them do take steps to cultivate their lands, the army soldiers, camel drivers, etc. destory their cultivation. Seeing them, cowherds etc. let their cattle loose into the fields, and when your slave remonstrates, the said camel drivers come forward to resist him with force. Your slave's preservation or ruin is in Your Majesty's hands and he prays. . .

Bahadur Shah raised his hand to signal the end of the audience. He could no longer listen to these monotonous wails and complaints. He had had enough for one day, enough for a whole life time. He was tired, tired, tired. The recital had ceased to be a coherent story. The words that came dancing and drumming around his head and ears, had no distinctive meaning. They all meant the same thing, failure, defeat, futility. What was the use of his striving, struggling and planning? He issued orders which were not obeyed. He gave instructions which were not implemented. His counsellors and officers, his own sons, came to him with endless professions of loyalty and obedience, but complaints of mismanagement, tyranny, chaos, continued to come from every direction in increasing numbers. He had been listening to the cries of his subjects for more than two hours and giving the same stereotyped orders: "Institute an enquiry," "Let the needful be done," "Let Mirza Mughal attend to this matter," "Mirza Mughal will send an officer of the Regiment to the spot." The orders would never be carried out. There was a big heap of complaints lying in front of the *Peshkar* waiting to be read out. To-

morrow, there would be a bigger heap and the day after that, a still bigger one. There was nothing, nothing at all that he could do. He felt thirsty and sleepy. His eyes smarted, but he knew no sleep would come to him when he lay down in his chamber. At any rate there he would be away from these agonizing laments, and Zeenat Mahal would stay with him and give relief to his tired limbs. He made a sign to Ahsanullah to approach, and told him to announce that the Durbar had concluded.

Back in his chamber, he lay down on his couch, but he could not drive away from his uneasy mind the echoes of the morning's proceedings. Words and phrases kept recurring and coming back to him and he felt oppressed and besieged by the tortured and suffering petitioners who stood supplicating and begging for his assistance. But, he could do nothing to help them, to judge their cause and to prove to them that he was worthy of their trust and loyalty.

It was late in the afternoon. He called his scribe and told him to take down what he dictated diligently and accurately:

To our son, the illustrious and valiant Mirza Zaheeruddin, otherwise known as Mirza Mughal Bahadur.

Let it be known to you that when the troops, Infantry and Cavalry, first came to the royal presence we told them personally by word of mouth that I had no treasures or property with which to assist them, but that I was not reluctant to offer my life if that could help them. They all expressed satisfaction with this declaration and even pledged their honour to sacrifice their lives in subordination and obedience to my commands. They took up their quarters in *Diwan-i-Khas* and *Diwan-i-Am*, the Mehtab Garden and other places, and behaved just as they pleased. In consideration of their ignorance and out of regard for their com-

fort, the servants of the State were forbidden to interfere with them. Then, although no promise had been made in the matter, money was borrowed in order that daily allowances might be paid to every man of the infantry and the cavalry. Repeated injunctions have been issued prohibiting plunder and aggression in the city, but all to no purpose. Moreover, notwithstanding that they were imperatively ordered to camp outside the city, and the men of the army whether cavalry or infantry, were prohibited from going about armed through the city and oppressing the inhabitants, yet one Regiment of infantry has taken up its quarter at the Delhi Gate, another at the Lahore Gate and yet another at the Ajmere Gate within the walls of the city, and they have thoroughly desolated several bazars. Regardless of night or day, they enter and plunder the houses of inhabitants on the false plea of looking for concealed Europeans. They force open locks and shop doors and openly carry away property. They commit these excesses, though all cities taken without military operations have always been exempted from sack and slaughter. Even Chengiz Khan and Nadir Shah, kings accredited as tyrants, gave peace and protection to such cities as surrendered without resistance. Again, although repeated orders have been issued to the infantrymen occupying the royal *farashkhana* and the Regiment of the cavalry staying in the garden to vacate these places, they have not yet done so. These are places which not even Nadir Shah nor Ahmed Shah Abdali nor any of the British Governors-General of India have entered on horseback. The troops first requested that the royal princes be appointed to different commands in the army, promising that they would obey them. This was done. They next urged that it would afford them great confidence if dresses of honour should be bestowed on the princes to give a character of stability to their appointments as Commandants. This was done, and the same day, a notification under our special seal proclaimed that Courts

of Justice had been established in the city, and prohibited acts of violence on the part of the soldiery. Even this had no effect.

Setting aside all this matter, it may be observed that whenever the most distinguished officers of the highest ranks in the service of the British Government visited the Palace, they dismounted at the door of *Diwan-i-Am* and come from thence on foot. These soldiers, however, used to come galloping up to the *Diwan-i-Khas* on their horses, till as a last resort both the gates were closed, only a wicket being left open; but they still rode up to the *Diwan-i-Am* and the *Jalwakhana* unsuitably dressed, without their turbans, in utter disregard of the form of respect due to royalty. The officers of the army, too, make a practice of coming into Court carelessly dressed, wearing caps instead of turbans, and carrying their sword. Again, notwithstanding that they have themselves uselessly wasted the whole of the magazine stores and the money that was in the Treasury, they now clamorously demand allowances daily, and above all, daily take allowances for more men than are present. Besides this, with oppression and violence, they forcibly take away the wares of the shopkeepers in the city without paying for them and commit every variety of other excesses and aggressions imaginable. The state of things outside the city also demands notice. In consequence of no military troops going out to keep order, hundreds of people are being murdered and the property of thousands is being plundered.

The tyranny and oppression now prevailing are a disgrace to our royal self, for they promote the belief that we as Sovereign are a party to them, and that we approve of rapine and murder. Is it by acts like these that the soldiery wish to prove their goodwill and establish amity between the King and populace on one side and army on the other? The one praiseworthy and prudent course for them would have been to protect and cherish the people, to study the approbation of the Sovereign, and to preserve unanimity of fellowship with

the servants of the State. The peace and quiet which would have resulted from such line of conduct were what we expected.

But it seems to us that the soldiery has no desire to act in any way to the advantage and benefit of the Government, and it is evident that the utter ruin of the sovereignty must ensue.

Wearied and helpless we have now resolved on making a vow to pass the remainder of our days in service acceptable to Allah, and relinquishing the title of Sovereign fraught with cares and troubles, and in our present griefs and sorrows assuming the garb of a religious mendicant, to proceed first and stay at the shrine of Saint Khwaja Sahib, and after making the necessary arrangements for the journey, to go eventually to Mecca.

Even before he signed this document, Bahadur Shah knew that he was inextricably involved in the hopeless struggle for freedom started by the sepoys. He had given them a King's blessing and acknowledged their homage. No matter what happened, he could not forsake them now, or isolate himself from what was happening all around him. He would have to go on and abide by whatever Allah in His clemency chose to decree. His letter to Mirza Mughal would, he hoped, arouse his conscience and instil in him a sense of urgency and discipline.

News was brought by the sepoys that more than a thousand British soldiers had entrenched themselves in the town of Meerut and fortified their position with guns and artillery. The territory between Delhi and Meerut was infested with marauding *gujars* who robbed and killed villagers and travellers. Bahadur Shah decided to send Mirza Mughal to capture Meerut from the British garrison and decimate the *gujars*. He summoned the Prince and communicated his decision to him.

Mirza Mughal made a low bow, and with eyes down-cast said: "The commands of my illustrious father, Shadow of the Almighty, rest on my head and eyes. I am ready at all times to carry out Your Majesty's behest. But as Your Majesty is well aware, your humble slave has little experience of warfare. I beseech you to command Mirza Amir-ud-din Khan, Mirza Zia-ud-din Khan and Hasan Ali Khan, all great chiefs holding extensive territories and possessed of vast experience in leading armies, to accompany me. I am confident that I shall, in this manner, be awarded the gift of victory by Allah, and I promise to exterminate the English and all their soldiers, men, women and children in their stronghold at Meerut."

Bahadur Shah looked at the three chiefs named by Mirza Mughal. They bowed their heads to avoid the King's eye and remained speechless. Ahsanullah Khan approached his master and whispered in his ear:

"If your Majesty would have the goodness to permit me........"

"Speak," said the King lowering his voice to a matching whisper. Only the King heard the Hakim's suggestion. The youthful presence of Abubakr had of late, given cause for great anxiety, as his drunken bouts and amorous adventures had become an open scandal, and if he were not restrained, something untoward and utterly regrettable might happen. The young lad had plenty of energy and ambition. If he were afforded an opportunity to win a spectacular victory, the resentment which he had of late provoked might be transformed into approval and even applause. As colonel of His Majesty's army, he was eminently fitted to lead a campaign for liberating Meerut. "I am confident the young Prince will not disobey Your Majesty's command," concluded the Hakim.

Bahadur Shah looked at his vizir with incredulity and surprise. The Hakim answered the look with calm earnestness, a physician brushing aside his patient's objections. Mahboob Ali stepped forward, "I beg Your

Majesty to accept the Hakim's advice," he said. "God willing, all will be for the best."

Bahadur Shah pondered a long moment. Then he raised his head and said: "Very well. Mirza Abubakr will march to Meerut and free it from the hold of the British garrison."

The expedition was a total failure. The English met Abubakr's forces at the Hindan river. There was a mild exchange of fire, while Abubakr, standing on the roof of a nearby house, shouted encouragement to his officers. Suddenly a shell fired by the enemy burst near him and covered his gunmen with dust. The prince promptly abandoned his improvised watch-tower, jumpped down from the roof and mounting a horse, galloped back to a place of safety in the rear of the army. The men, ready to emulate their leader, beat a hasty retreat. The English inflicted heavy losses on Abubakr's soldiers and captured their guns. When the bodies of the wounded and dead were brought to the city, the inhabitants shouted that now the "brave" liberators had received the award they richly deserved after their tyrannous behaviour towards their own countrymen. Abubakr presented himself before the King, and bragged of a valiant victory over the British. The King shook his head in despair, and asked himself: "Why did I agree to let this good-for-nothing youngster lead a major expedition?"

On the advice of his counsellors, he sent reinforcements to hearten and assist the few stragglers who were still trying to resist the advance of the British; but their efforts were of no avail. The troops, led by an incompetent and inexperienced commander, once again abandoned the battlefield, leaving a much smaller foe in possession. The news of the ignominious defeat spread through the city causing consternation, surprise, resentment and a sense of despair. Disorder broke once again. Shops were closed and looting of sweetmeat shops was reported from many localities. The Muslims of the city came to Bahadur Shah in a deputation and

called upon him to declare *jehad*, a total religious war, against the English. The enthusiasm born of desperation brought a new resolve; money was offered by the merchants; the soldiers prepared to make a fresh assault on the British forces which continued to approach Delhi. But the only result was another disaster. The British defeated the royal troops at Badli-ki-Serai and occupied a position of vantage on the ridge. It was now obvious that the English intended to maintain their pressure and take a vigorous offensive action by an assault on Delhi itself. A harassed, bewildered King, completely at this wit's end, changed his Commander-in-Chief, but the new General, after a brief sally, ran back as hastily as Mirza Abubakr, leaving all his field-pieces behind. In the days that followed, a hopeless gloom settled over the State, and Bahadur Shah no longer thought of recapturing his kingdom and regaining the past glory of the Mughal Empire. He searched for a means of escaping from the futile striving against the inevitable. He would be content to spend the few days that remained of his life in some sequestered and quiet shrine where he could meditate and say his five daily prayers. But he was being spun round in the vortex of an uncontrollable and irredeemable movement which was neither peace nor war. The Indian troops urged by incompetent officers, continued to make futile sorties against the strongly entrenched positions of the British forces, but each time, they were repelled and driven back. In a bitter moment of utter helplessness, Bahadur Shah lost his temper and shouted that he expected nothing, nothing at all from the sepoys. "They have harassed me and misled me, they have not won a single victory and yet they continue to plunder their own people." Each day the same story was repeated; the troops would march out boasting of their indomitable courage and determination to annihilate the foreign tyrant; each day they would stampede back almost as soon as they were fired upon and re-enter the city in disarray. One day, six thousand sepoys with twelve guns marched out

of the city, the next day ten thousand men went forth. But, a handful of disciplined and organised Englishmen routed them. Someone said the first of the month of *Zeeqada* was an auspicious day. It was the centenary of the Battle of Plassey and the astrologers had foretold that the British power in India would end after a hundred years of its commencement. Also, it was a holy day of pilgrimage for the Hindus, and what more rewarding pilgrimage could there be than a journey to exterminate the enemy on the battlefield. But the prediction proved wrong, and before the day ended, the British forces had pushed themselves almost up to the city wall and taken possession of the Subzi Mandi area. The survivors returned to the city utterly and totally defeated.

But these defeats and the sense of failure which they brought, did not deter an adventurer from Bareilly, Mohammed Baksh, or as he was more popularly known, Mohammed Bakht Khan. He was a descendant of Ghulam Qadir Rohilla, but on his mother's side he claimed affinity with line of Nawab Shuja-ud-daula of Oudh. He had served as an army officer in the forces of the East India Company and had taken part in the Afghan War. He had been promoted to the rank of a subedar in the Artillery. Possessed of the sort of courage, ruthlessness and single-minded resolve which makes for successful leadership, he seized upon the rebellion of the Meerut sepoys to indulge his passion for soldiery. After some minor skirmishing, he mustered four regiments of infantry, one of cavalry, a horse battery and two pot guns, and assuming the title of Brigadier, he marched to Delhi. He crossed the boat-bridge over the Jamuna in full view of the English army officers keeping a look out from their camp on the ridge, and made his way to the Palace. He pushed his way forward through groups of protesting courtiers, assembled in the *Diwan-i-Khas*, and walking right up to the King's seat, made a brief salaam as if he were addressing an equal. He took his sword and presented it to Bahadur

Shah. His manner was rough and almost rude, and he completely lacked the sycophant's polish and grace and the fake courtesy of seasoned courtiers; he was unfamiliar with the involved and flowery phraseology in use for addressing the Emperor; but he had sincerity, honesty of purpose and a selfless resolve to offer his life and services to the King. He addressed himself to Bahadur Shah without waiting to be asked to make his submission. He began by saying that he was a descendant of the same family as Bahadur Shah himself.

"You can make an enquiry and verify the veracity of my statement. I have come to fight for you and win. I am familiar with the tactics and methods of the British army. I shall, Allah willing, be a match for them. But I am told you have given the princes commands in the army. This is bad. What do they know of fighting? Has any of them ever killed a man in mortal combat? Has any of them ridden across a battlefield through a rain of rifle bullets? Has any of them ever been wounded? Do they know the army drill and the art of campaigning against a powerful enemy?"

He looked round at the princes standing in a group behind him, and gave them a long haughty stare, as if he were challenging them to raise their arms and attack him, and then continued: "Fighting is a soldier's job and not the game of *shahzadas* brought up to lie on soft cushions and wear brocade jackets. Let them spend their days drinking forbidden liquor and their nights in exercising their hands on the soft breasts and thighs of their women. I am a soldier and of royal blood. I want to serve you. Give me the power, and I shall make proper arrangements."

Bahadur Shah could not resist the earnestness of Bakht Khan's rough and uncourtly manner, but in the open Durbar he hesitated to make a sudden and irrevocable decision. He said:

"The princes were appointed at the request of the officers of the army. They are our sons, and we look

upon you also as our loyal and beloved son. We have heard a great deal about you, and are pleased to see you in person. The deeds performed by your army are worthy of our royal praise. Everything will be done as you wish."

A risaldar of the King's army begged the King to bestow a sword and a buckler upon Bakht Khan: "He deserves them, and it is but proper that such a Chief be favoured in this manner."

Bahadur Shah tried to evade the request and said: "They are not ready."

"But, Your Majesty," pleaded the risaldar who was now joined by Maulvi Imdad Ali, an influential courtier, "the Brigadier is worthy of this recognition, and you should not hesitate to confer this honour upon him."

Thus importuned, Bahadur Shah ordered a sword and a buckler to be brought from the armoury, and bestowed them upon Bakht Khan. He stood up and grasped his hand, calling him once again his trusted son. Bakht Khan accepted the favour as if it were less than his due, and did not reciprocate by the formal offer of a *nazr* in token of his gratitude and his allegiance to the Emperor. A brief cloud passed over the King's countenance, and he dismissed the discourteous brigadier by observing that after the fatigue of his long and arduous march he must be in need of refreshing himself for the task which lay ahead of him.

With all his experience, his administrative ability and his indefatigable energy, Bakht Khan was no more successful than his predecessors. It was impossible to infuse a sense of discipline in the ragged, irresponsible army now used to sustaining itself by plunder and pillage. Bakht Khan had brought with him four lakhs of rupees but this was quite insufficient to pay the wages of the entire army gathered in and around the capital, for more than a few weeks. A brief respite was all he succeeded in achieving. His endeavours to drive the firmly entrenched British from the ridge proved fruit-

less. The indiscipline in his army, the looting and pillage and the harassment of the citizens, continued unabated.

Farkhanda Zamani Begum lived in a modestly furnished house in one of the lanes behind Faiz Bazar. She was young and handsome and was a princess of royal blood. Her husband, a mere commoner and not possessed of either wealth or position, had long resigned himself to the status of a mere attendant, and was content, without feeling the slightest resentment, to watch the festivities and listen to the musical enertainments that had, during the past twelve months, become a regular feature of his house.

Mirza Abubakr was one of Farkhanda Zamani Begum's regular visitors. He always came accompanied by his complete equipage of horse-drawn carriage, liveried attendants and a posse of uniformed and armed troopers. Since the Hindan affair, these visits had become more frequent and more lively. The singing and dancing provided by Farkhanda Zamani's group of entertianers and an abundance of liquor and wine helped to rehabilitate the young prince, and made him forget the misfortune which had befallen his solitary military adventure. The day after the arrival of Mohammed Bakht Khan and his Rohilla regiments, Abubakr went earlier than usual to seek the comfort of his mistress' warmth and affection. While his men waited outside, he gorged himself with the pleasures of the flesh. Each time he thought of the impertinent, arrogant and ill-mannered Bakht Khan, he raised his cup and emptied it, and snuggled closer into Zamani Begum's arms. As the hours went by, the prince's memory ceased to needle him, and he was transported to a state of euphoria in which nothing mattered except the here and now.

The sun had set and the night was well advanced when, his desires fully sated, he decided to leave the

arms of his beloved and return to the Palace. But when he called his attendant to prepare his equipage he was told that the key of the streetgate was with the watchman who was not to be found. The Mirza got up, and standing in the doorway looking down into the ill-lit street, gave vent to a torrent of abuse:

"This is another villainy on the part of the ill-begotten upstart who has come here to teach us the art of warfare. A conspiracy between the watchman and the Rohilla. The Rohillas have always been our enemies. Bakht Khan's traitorous ancestor blinded my great-grandfather. Let him come before me. I shall teach him a lesson. With this sword I shall hack him into such small pieces...."

He stopped abruptly and looking at a dark figure sitting in front of a house farther up the street, shouted: "Hey, who are you and what are you doing there sitting and smiling so smugly?"

The man stood up, and making a low salaam, answered: "*Hazur,* I am Ahsan-ul-Haq son of Mufti Ikram-ud-din, Professor of Muslim Law.

"Then why are you sitting here? Why don't you go and call the watchman? Am I to wait here all night?"

"*Hazur,*" Ahsan-ul-Haq stammered, "the watchman has gone to urinate."

"You are lying," said the prince, his anger boiling up. "Since when have watchmen acquired the habit of going to another street to pass water? You are lying, this is a deliberate plan to detain us here."

He drew his pistol and fired it at Ahsan-ul-Haq. Seeing that he had completely missed his aim, he broke out into a long and unrestrained stream of invective. Ahsan-ul-Haq ran inside and chained the door. The Mirza went up to the entrance and began to shower blows on the door with his sword. He ordered his servants to throw stones into the house over the wall of the courtyard.

"*Chalo,*" he called out, and signalled to his troop-

ers to approach. "Break open the door and carry away all that is inside the traitor's house. I am sure he is harbouring an Englishman or he would not be sitting outside and guarding his door at this time of the night."

At this stage, the watchman arrived with the gate-key and pleaded that he had in fact gone to empty his bladder in the next street. The prince was in no mood to listen to explanations. The watchman was clearly in league with Bakht Khan and had gone away with the key in order to harass and intimidate the prince. He went up to the miscreant and threw him to the ground and stamped upon him. He began to hack at him with his sword. It was only the intensity of his passion and the lack of exact co-ordination between his mind and limbs that saved the watchman's life. The troopers began to shoot indiscriminately, injuring several passers-by. Khuda Baksh Khan, assistant to the Chief Police Officer, who came to enquire into the cause of the disturbance was hit by a stray bullet. To complete the vindication of the Mirza's honour, some household articles were carried away from Ahsan-ul-Haq's house, the watchman was deprived of his pink turban, the emblems of his office, and the police officer of his pistol. The Mirza and his equipage then drove home to the Red Fort with exclamations of joy and satisfaction.

Early the next morning, Ahsan-ul-Haq presented himself at the Palace-gate and handed a petition addressed to the King, Shelter of the World, in which he described the details of Mirza Abubakr's tyrannous conduct and set out a list of the articles carried away from his house.

The petition was placed before the King who wrote on it with his own hand:

Our son, the illustrious and valiant Mirza Zaheer-ud-din otherwise Mirza Mughal Bahadur. Take note. You are directed to search out and recover from the servants of Mirza Abubakr Bahadur, a sword and a pink turban, the property of Kamdar Khan, watchman

of Faiz Bazar who was wounded, and forward them to the royal presence. You are directed also to recover from the men of the said Mirza the property of Mohammed Ahsan-ul-Haq son of Mufti Ikram-ud-din whose petition is enclosed, as also to recover and forward to the royal presence, the property of Khuda Baksh Khan, assistant to the chief police officer. Be assured of our continued benevolence.

Beyond the south wall, amid the ruins of the previous dead cities which had flourished, prospered and disintegrated through the centuries, dwelt the manufacturers of ice. They lived in poorly constructed huts of timber, mud and straw which filled the space between Delhi Gate and Turkman Gate. Here, each winter, they tidied up their pits, lined them with straw and laid out their metal pans. Each cold night, word was sent around and the ice-makers came out with their vessels of water. They worked through the night, pouring water over the ice crust, and before dawn, gathered the fruit of their labour and took it to the deep trench which served them for an ice store. Into this the ice blocks were thrown and beaten down till they merged with the harvest of the previous nights to form one solid, consolidated mass. The process continued through the months of December and January, and when the cold weather ended, the ice was covered up and insulated till the advent of summer when it was extracted little by little and sent to the British officers and merchants and to the royal household as a luxury unknown since the camel trains of Jehangir had stopped bringing the ice blocks from the Himalayas. No one troubled the ice-makers. They led comfortable lives, they produced as much as 3,00 maunds of ice each year which they sold at one or two annas a seer. But they were not rich, their wealth consisted of the perishable stock of ice buried in front of their huts and what they sold was less than half of what they manu-

factured. There were many agents and middlemen to satisfy before they concluded their transactions. Their importance had come to be realised and they enjoyed the protection of the Residency as well as of the Court, and they were content to remain poor, unambitious and unenvied. The Rohilla regiments who came with Mohammed Bakht Khan were ordered to camp beyond the city walls. They occupied the only available spot near the southern wall. On the north and west, constant skirmishing made peaceful camping impossible, and on the east lay the Jamuna. So their camp was set up close to the huts of the ice-men. Within a day of their arrival, the soldiers began to help themselves with whatever they could lay their hands on. Food, utensils, clothes, and even the wood and timber of the ice-makers' huts were carried away, and if any one protested, he was beaten or taken into custody. The ice-men sent a petition to the King praying that since the army could not be moved, they might be permitted to move to the enclosure near Raja Jai Singh's Observatory otherwise known as Jantar Mantar.

As soon as he read the petition, the King wrote an order in his own hands "Mirza Mughal Bahadur will give the petitioners place in the Observatory and will issue a written order."

The monsoon had set in and one day when the army returned to the city without having fired a single shot because the flooding of the countryside after a heavy shower impeded their advance, Bahadur Shah lost his temper and spoke to the officers in anger:

"You have spent all the money you brought with you, my own treasury is empty and without a single *paisa*. The sepoys are deserting everyday and returning to their homes. I have now no hope of gaining victory. It is my desire that you leave the city and go elsewhere. Six thousand *mujahids* have asked for permission to come here. What will they do here?

There are sixty thousand here already and they do nothing. The sepoys boast that they are going out to destroy the English but they run back and harass the citizens. There is not the least doubt that the English will capture the city and kill me. Let the will of Allah be done."

Once again, there was a sudden upsurge of loyal emotion, and the officers, about a hundred and fifty in number, swore to redouble their efforts and defeat the enemy. They sought Bahadur Shah's blessing, and as on the first day, he placed his hand on the head of each officer and commended him to the protection of the all-powerful hand of God. Bakht Khan declared that he would most certainly be victorious in his next endeavour. The officers and soldiers thereafter gave a display of greater determination and courage. But the result was heavier losses than before. Toward the end of July, Bahadur Shah issued a special *Id* message urging united action by the Hindus and Muslims of the city and prayed for the destruction of the enemy. The next day the news of a formidable attack on British positions was printed and circulated. But despite the undaunted attacks of the royal army and the encouragement given by Bahadur Shah in words of praise and promises of rewards, Bakht Khan was quite unable to dislodge the British, and as August advanced, reinforcements arrived on the ridge, and the British army began gradually to tighten the siege of the city. There were many bloody battles taking a heavy toll of lives on both sides, but the King's forces were losing ground. Surprisingly, they did not wholly despair. Even Mirza Mughal, at a time when defeat was staring him in the face, wrote to his father to put a measure of cheer into the old man's sorrowing heart:

"Your Exalted Majesty may keep your mind free from the dread of the enemy. Your slave has personally been staying in the batteries with the troops for the last two days. The batteries of the infidels stay where they were and have made no advance. Had

their batteries moved forward, they would have entered the city. The whole of our army is prepared to stop the infidels and an attack will soon be made. Since some of Your Majesty's subjects may speak to you of what they claim to have heard and seen, do not give credence to them. Be fully assured that as long as there is life in the frames of your slaves, no harm shall come to Your Majesty. The matter now awaits the dispensation of Allah."

But, a soldier's body cannot be for ever sustained by the emotion of loyalty and unfulfilled promises. With the tightening of the siege, food was becoming scarce, and whatever provisions arrived from outside, were either captured by the British or surreptitiously sold to them at better prices than the King's depleted resources could provide. The officers and sepoys began to importune the King for their wages and money to buy food. They threatened to plunder the Palace and the city. At about this time, the powder magazine accidentally blew up. The sepoys swore it was the doing of Hakim Ahsanullah Khan who was a traitor. They plundered his house and took him into custody, disregarding the King's assurances of his loyalty and innocence. Full of sorrow and despair, Bahadur Shah, with the fire of anger in his eyes, faced the officers who had come to him to ask for money. Rising from his chair, he threw on the ground the embroidered cushion on which he had been sitting.

"Take this," he shouted as his voice rose to a shrill note. "Take the *kasooli* on which your King sits. Take all the property of the Palace, horses, elephants, carriages, raths and all the harness. Take the Begums' ornaments and whatever remains of my jewels. Ah, merciful Allah, that I should have lived to see this day."

He turned his face to the west and burst into tears: "Oh, my Allah, merciful, bountiful Allah, you have punished me for my sins. I deserve all you have given me. And now be even more merciful. Let me

die, so that this old and miserable body may at least, rest in the peace of the grave."

He sat down on his seat, and covering his face with both his hands, bent down to rest his forehead on his knees. His whole frame was shaken by silent sobs, and the spectacle of the King's broken spirit moved the entire Court to tears. From behind the screens the weeping of the Begums could be heard. There was a long silence, and then Mirza Mughal said that he would contribute forty thousand rupees immediately, and the sepoys should take that for the time being. He promised to raise more money after a day or two. A merchant from the city moved forward and said that his life and property were at the disposal of the King, and in two days, he would collect one lakh and fifteen thousand rupees from the traders of the city and bring them to the Palace. These noble sentiments and well-meant promises could not be implemented. The stranglehold on the city tightened each day, and there were quarrels, mutual recriminations and exchanges of sharp words between Bahadur Shah and Bakht Khan. Bahadur Shah, his body tired beyond endurance, his spirit broken, began issuing irresponsible, reckless orders which he knew could not be executed. He went to the fortifications and told the soldiers to stay at their posts and die. He ordered conscription in the city of Delhi, and declared that it was the sacred duty of every man, Hindu, and Muslim, to go out and attack the British. He ordered the police to collect three months' rent from every shop and house. He ordered the princes who had misappropriated the money intended for the soldier's wages to be arrested. He ordered the sweetmeat-makers to send sixty maunds of sweets to the sepoys.

And now, bullets began to fall like a monsoon shower into the Palace; the ramparts of the city were being breached, and the city was in a state of confusion and desperation. Bahadur Shah sat in his apartments and went through the motions of holding Dur-

bars, hearing reports, issuing orders with a full awareness of the futility of everything he did and said. One day after he had been persistently importuned by the princes to put on his armour and ride out of the Palace he said: "Very well, we shall ourselves go to the battlefield and fight." But it was a futile venture. The British guns were pouring out fire and destruction all over the city, and he returned to the Palace crestfallen and utterly broken in spirit. Slowly, as the days dragged on, he saw his world crumbling and closing in upon him from all sides. The bastions of the city fell one by one. The massive stone wall over which a carriage and four could be driven was being breached under the continued assault of heavy guns. The British soldiers began to push their way in and fight the King's soldiers in streets and bazars. Once or twice they were driven back. The city *kotwal* went round at night, urging the people to arm themselves and kill every white man they saw. One day a messenger came running to the Palace, and sobbing with joy, told Bahadur Shah that he had seen a hundred British soldiers killed and their bodies were lying in heaps all the way from Jama Masjid to Chandni Chowd. Bahadur Shah received the news with a bitter laugh and a shake of his head. It was too late to rejoice over the death of a hundred white men when the whole of the city was being laid waste and thousands of his people had died and thousands more had fled to face the hazards of the open country. At someone's suggestion he sent his silver *howdah* and his personal plate to a hastily set up mint in a narrow lane off Dariba, the street of the silversmiths, so that there should be some money for his clamouring sepoys. Before the coins were delivered, a mob of angry sepoys came to the door of his private apartments and began shouting loudly and abusing him. He came out to meet them and stood before them weeping like a whipped child and saying: "I have done everything I can for you. Now only my life is left. Take it too, for

Allah's sake, take it." The soldiers continued to abuse him, but moved back and slowly dispersed. News of fresh disasters kept coming in till Bahadur Shah wondered how it was possible for so many men to die and for so many buildings to be demolished. Zeenat Mahal came to him, day after day, and stood silent by his side. From time to time, she drew deep sighs that seemed to be searing her inside, and wiped the tears from her rounded cheeks. Many of the Palace servants, male as well as female, had already deserted and only a few of the faithful ones remained.

And then one evening, Bakht Khan came and told him that it was no longer possible to defend the city or continue the fight there. He was no longer the rough and haughty Rohilla who had hitherto given the appearance of ordering the King rather than receiving his commands. His tone was humble, almost beseeching. "Your Majesty, I have gathered what remains of my forces. Come to Lucknow with me, we can make our way there in complete safety. I shall, *Inshaallah*, collect a fresh army and fight the British under your banner. Come, I beg you, there is no time to lose. The British plan to enter the Palace tomorrow and we are unable to prevent them."

Bahadur Shah merely shook his head in despair. Later, when he thought over his moment of inaction, he found it difficult to explain the reason which had led him to decline Bakht Khan's offer. Had he mistrusted the good faith of the General, who, despite all his outbursts of temper, his rudeness, his arrogance and his courtly graces fought for him valiantly and tried to contend against incompetence, indiscipline, lack of provisions and ammunition. Surely, he would not have acted the traitor and betrayed him in the end. Or did he mistrust Bakht Khan's ability to conduct him safely to Lucknow? No, that would not have been difficult for the route to Lucknow had not yet fallen into British hands. It was perhaps an inner conviction that further efforts on his part were futile, and he must

prepare *himself* for whatever *Allah* had decreed as *his* lot. Also, he felt that his place was in Delhi whose people and streets, whose mosques and buildings, whose very stones claimed him. They belonged to him and he belonged to them. And finally, he had a holy task to perform, a sacred charge which he must not abandon. But these were subsequent rationalisations. He knew that at the moment of refusing Bakht Khan's offer, he had not reasoned with himself, he had not thought of any of these things. He had been in a dazed state, incapable of defining the force which held him back.

For a long time after Bakht Khan had taken his leave and gone away, Bahadur Shah sat brooding and muttering incoherent prayers. It was late at night when he rose and walked through the royal apartments which wore a dismal and deserted appearance. A few inlaid gems gleamed from the walls and ceilings in the dim light of a lamp which appeared to have been thrown down by one of the servants departing in haste. A breath of warm bank air carrying a stale fishy odour came from the direction of the river and clung about his face. He stood in the centre of the *Diwan-i-Khas* looking around at the desolation of the old Mughal splendour. He wondered just how it had looked in the days of Shah Jehan when the gem-studded marble walls had all the lustre of their newness, and the King sat on the *Takht-i-Taoos* acknowledging the homage of his chiefs and courtiers. The glory and the splendour had gone after but a brief manifestation. A few years of gorging the succulent fruit of life and then had come the inevitable,—the mock feasting, the frugality and the fasting. It was the will of Allah that it should be thus; how else could a band of trading unbelievers from across the seven seas who had come as suppliants and stayed as loyal subjects, have acquired the power to seize the whole empire of the House of Timur? His subjects, his grantees, had usurped his power and reduced him to a state of helpless penury. They had

slowly thrown away even the pretence of allegiance and now the end had come. He was alone, absolutely alone. He could not say how many hours of life remained to him. Would he be killed even before he was able to discharge the sacred task entrusted to him? Would he see Zeenat Mahal and Jawan Bakht before death closed his eyes? They, at any rate, were safe. He was glad he had insisted on their going away to the house in Lal Kua. From there it would not be difficult for them to escape and find safety elsewhere. Perhaps they would be spared their lives if they stayed on in Lal Kua.

He came back to his chamber and took out the small wooden box which had remained in his charge for twenty years. He woke up the attendant who was lying asleep outside the door of his bed-chamber, and sent him to call Mirza Mughal or any of the princes who might still be in the fort and to prepare his horses. "We are not going far," he told the attendant," so do not delay."

It was still night when five dark figures groped their way down the semi-lit staircase which went down to the river. They emerged from the hidden gate, and mounting the horses which stood ready saddled, moved toward the south. The path they took was deserted, and there was no danger of their being surprised or attacked for several hours. But the solemnity of the occasion compelled silence, and when one of them said almost in a whisper "To Hazrat Sahib," the others made no response. Half an hour later, the party arrived at the mausoleum of Hazrat Nizam-ud-Din Aulia. Here the foremost rider dismounted and signalling the others to go on, went inside the shrine. He woke up the custodian, Ghulam Hasan Shah, and placed before him the wooden box he was carrying. He burst into tears, and in a voice shaken with sobs, said:

"Here is the holy relic, the three hairs from the beard of the Holy Prophet which were brought from Mecca Sharif five hundred years ago. They have re-

mained in charge of the House of Timur, coming down from father to son. I am no longer able to take care of this sacred charge and I place it in your hands."

Ghulam Hasan Shah was moved to tears by seeing the King's abject state. "Patience, Siraj-ud-Din, patience," he pleaded. "Pray to Allah and accept His decision. You look tired. Lie down and rest. You will not be disturbed."

Bahadur Shah raised his tear-stained face to the divine and whispered:

"Give me some food to eat. I am hungry. I have not eaten for two days."

Ghulam Hasan Shah went to a corner of the room and brought a few coarse *chappatis* and a spoonful of onion sauce. Bahadur Shah had difficulty in pushing down the dry, stale bread and the onions had a sharp vinegary tang. He swallowed a few morsels and stood up.

"Maulana," he said, "My task is done. I must leave you and go to the *maqbara* of Humayun where the princes are waiting for me. Hakim Ahsanullah Khan will also come there and tell me what I must do and where I must go."

Bahadur Shah's horse was waiting outside, and with the help of his attendant, he dragged his tired frame on to its back and made his way to Humayun's tomb. There were several men lying and sitting in small groups on the lawns around the mausoleum. On the platform, his sons, Mirza Mughal and Mirza Khair Sultan and his grandson, Abubakr who had earlier come with him, sat waiting. There was a messenger from Ahsanullah Khan who said that the Hakim was desirous of paying his respects to the King but he had no mount or conveyance. Bahadur Shah laughed and said, "Send him our elephant, Maula Baksh, and let him be brought to our royal presence." There was an audible titter from the princes as the messenger took his leave to carry the King's message to his master. The day was well-advanced towards noon when Ahsanullah Khan

accompanied by his brother, Hakim Ghulam Najaf Khan came riding on an elephant to Humayun's tomb. The elephant was not Bahadur Shah's favourite mount, Maula Baksh, but one that the Hakim had succeeded in persuading the British officers to place at his disposal. He fell down at his master's feet and loudly praised Allah that he had been vouchsafed the favour of setting eyes on his Emperor and paying his respects to him.

"Refuge of the World," he continued, "Your Majesty did well in refusing to go with Bakht Khan. Your slave has been trying through the intervention of Mirza Illahi Baksh to obtain honourable terms of a settlement with the British. We must wait for a reply to the *mukhtar-nama* which Queen Zeenat Mahal has sent to the army authorities. The Queen has been so distressed about Your Majesty's welfare. We are confident that a favourable reply will be received to her representation."

Bahadur Shah answered the Hakim with a sad smile and a wave of his hand. He had no choice in the matter. He must wait where he was, till....he could not say till when or till what. The day went slowly on its course. Groups of men came, paid their homage to the King and went away when told not to crowd the neighbourhood. Prince Mohammed Azim came with a band of sepoys and wanted to set up a camp within the enclosure of the mausoleum. But he was persuaded to go away and not jeopardise the King's life. In the evening, Bahadur Shah had a light meal and lay down to sleep. The mental torture and bodily strain of the last few years had so exhausted him that he slept soundly till dawn. He was woken up by Mirza Qadir Baksh who came to beseech him to leave Delhi and accompany him to a place of safety. Bahadur Shah told him that he was in Allah's hands, and was going to wait for whatever was in store for him.

A long and anxious wait began as the hours slowly dragged on towards noon. At last a small party of men on horseback accompanied by a palanquin was

seen approaching. Hakim Ahsanullah at once said that Mirza Ilahi Baksh was coming and the manner of his coming augured well for the King. Fakharuddin's father-in-law, on arriving, made his obeisance and placed before the King an order guaranteeing his safety, as also the safety of the Queen and Mirza Jawan Bakht.

"Your Majesty," he explained, "this order says that if all who are present here lay down their arms and if you go alone in the palanquin I have brought, you will be permitted to go to Zeenat Mahal's house in Lal Kua and stay there till the Governor-General Bahadur passes further orders in respect of Your Majesty's future. Captain Hodson Sahib is following and will soon be here to conduct Your Majesty. In the meantime, he has sent Maulvi Rajab Ali with twenty-five Sikh cavalrymen."

Bahadur Shah knew Rajab Ali, the Head of the British Intelligence Department. He knew to what extent the Sikhs had allied themselves with the British. He knew that he was now a prisoner of the victorious British army.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

It was a cold day in January. Bahadur Shah sat on a low couch, his body huddled under a coarse shawl. His finely chiselled features, arched eyebrows and acquiline profile bending over his knees, his frail delicate fingers moving over the beads of his rosary, the sickly pallor of his olive-coloured complexion and a nervous twitching of the face gave him the appearance of a tragic but nevertheless fascinating figure. A little distance away, Zeenat Mahal and two of her girls sat round a lighted brazier warming themselves. Suddenly the Begum threw up her arms and shouted across the room: "How long, Ya Allah, how long are we to stay here? Four months have gone by and we are being kept prisoners. When are they going to set us free?"

Bahadur Shah continued to tell his beads in silence. Of late, Zeenat Mahal had begun to display a great deal of impatience, frequently losing her temper and shouting at her slave girls, at Bahadur Shah and at the curious visitors, mostly Europeans, who came to see the royal prisoners and feed their curiosity. Sometimes she would refuse to be seen by them and ran to an inner room hurling imprecations at every one. Bahadur Shah, on the other hand, remained for the most part silent, brooding, toying with his beads or knitting his brows over a sheet of writing in the dim light of the room. In four of the meanest rooms of the Palace, he and Zeenat Mahal and Jawan Bakht had been confined since their surrender in September. They had been provided with a few servants who, for lack of occupation, sat idling away their time. The meals of the prisoners were supp-

lied from the British Army kitchen. The food was plain and frugal. No one had told them how long they would have to remain in confinement and what the British authorities intended to do with them. To Bahadur Shah, the three and a half months' incarceration seemed a long period, and his past life in the Red Fort, his durbars and *jashans*, the shoddy luxury of his apartments, the gaiety of his singing and dancing girls and the rich variety of his table viands were becoming a fading memory. Zeenat Mahal's outbursts and her frequent reminders of their present state galled him. The future was in Allah's hands and it was not for him to question His decrees.

A slave girl entered the room, and making a low bow, said that Ghulam Abbas, the King's vakil and mukhtar craved leave to make a submission. Bahadur Shah pulled himself up, and wrapping his shawl more closely round his frail and bent body hobbled into the room where Ghulam Abbas stood with bowed head, a sheaf of papers pressed against his chest.

"Your Majesty," he said, as soon as Bahadur Shah was seated, "I am the bearer of evil tidings. The British authorities have taken a decision that Your Majesty be tried by a Military Court upon charges of murder and treason."

Bahadur Shah remained silent for what seemed an interminable moment. Ghulam Abbas began to wonder if the King had heard him. At last, Bahadur Shah gave vent to a laugh of incredulity and said:

"Murder? What murder have I committed? When I remember how that deceitful monster, Hodson, shot my sons and grandson, the blood begins to pour out of my eyes. And I am accused of murder! What have the British done to Delhi, my Delhi? There is not a Hindu nor a Muslim left alive. Every House in the city is desolate, and all over the country our people are being slaughtered and blown off from guns. Yet, it is I who am to be tried for murder and treason?"

From the next room came the shrill cry of

Zeenat Mahal Begum: "It is all the doing of Hakim Ahsanullah Khan. I never trusted him. I warned Your Majesty against him when you were ill. You will see he will deceive you and give evidence against you. He has always worked against us. It would have been so much better if we had listened to Bakht Khan and gone away with him."

There was an awkward pause when the Begum ceased speaking. Ghulam Abbas took some papers from the bundle in his hand and placed them before Bahadur Shah. "This, Your Majesty," he explained, "is the list of charges in English with an Urdu translation prepared by James Murphy. I have been asked to hand it to Your Majesty."

Bahadur Shah read the charge sheet.

1st—For that he, being a pensioner of the British Government in India, did at Delhi, at various times between the 10th of May and 1st of October, 1857, encourage, aid and abet, Mohammed Bakht Khan, Subedar of the Regiment of Artillery, and diverse others, native commissioned officers and soldiers unknown, of the East India Company's Army, in the crimes of mutiny and rebellion against the State.

2nd—For having at Delhi, at various times between 10th of May and 1st of October 1857 encouraged, aided and abetted Mirza Mughal, his own son, a subject of the British Government in India, and others unknown, inhabitants of Delhi, and of the North-West Province of India, also the subjects of the said British Government, to rebel and wage war against the State.

3rd—For that he, being a subject of the British Government of India, and not regarding the duty of his allegiance, did at Delhi, on the 11th of May 1857, or thereabouts, as a false traitor against the State, proclaim and declare himself the reigning King and Sovereign of India and did then and there traitorously seize and take unlawful possession of the

city of Delhi and did moreover, at various times between the 10th of May and 1st of October, 1857, as such false traitor aforesaid, treasonably conspire, consult and agree with Mirza Mughal, his own son, and with Mohammed Bakht Khan, Subedar of the Regiment of Artillery, and diverse others, false traitors unknown, to raise, levy and make insurrection, rebellion and war against the State and further to fulfil and perfect his treasonable design of overthrowing and destroying the British Government in India, did assemble armed forces at Delhi, and send them forth to fight and wage war against the British Government.

4th—For that, he at Delhi, on the 16th of May 1857, or thereabouts, did within the precincts of the Palace at Delhi, feloniously, cause and become accessory to the murder of 49 persons, chiefly women and children of European and mixed European descent, and did moreover between the 10th of May and 1st of October 1857, encourage and abet diverse soldiers and others in murdering European officers, and other English subjects, including women and children, both by giving and promising such murderers service, advancement, distinction, and further, that he issued orders to different Native Rulers having local authority in India, to slay and murder Christian and English people whenever and wherever found on their territories, the whole or any part of such conduct being heinous offence under Act XVI of 1857 of the Legislative Council in India.

The charge-sheet bore the signature of Major F. J. Harriott, Deputy Judge Advocate General and Government Prosecutor. Bahadur Shah read the name aloud as if that were the only important item in the document. More to break the awkward strain than to give a needed explanation, Ghulam Abbas said: "Refuge of the World, he has been conducting the trial of the Raja of Ballabgarh, and has now been entrusted with

the case against Your Majesty."

"And has Raja Nahar Singh been condemned to death?"

Ghulam Abbas hung his head. Raja Nahar Singh had been promised amnesty, but had nevertheless been tried, found guilty and condemned to death.

"But, Your Majesty, these charges are all false. The whole world knows Your Majesty did not authorise the killing of the Europeans. The soldiers killed them against your commands."

Bahadur Shah shook his head. "You are living in a world of your own, Ghulam Abbas, a world of ignorance and make-belief. The British always used to boast of their honesty, their fair play and the impartial justice dispensed by their courts. But these were hollow protests. They will put me to death as they have the Raja of Ballabgarh."

Bahadur Shah re-read the list of charges. He laughed derisively: "So we are the subject of the British Government in India. But nobody has, till now, denied our legal status of the Emperor of India. The British are our subjects under the Diwani of Bengal. Oof, the perfidy of these people."

The trial of Bahadur Shah took place in the *Diwan-i-Khas*. It was a cold day towards the end of January 1858. The spectators who had collected outside the Hall, an hour before the appointed time, were glad of the warmth poured out by the sun from a cloudless sky. Small groups of army and civil officers stood gossiping and exchanging their experiences of the past few months. A young captain in uniform was describing how he had arrested a hundred and twenty sepoys, before they could have the opportunity to shed the blood of a white man. "I was going to give them all they deserved." But my commanding officer was adamant. "No more than forty," he said, and forty it had to be. I had them blown from guns. Ha, ha,

the dirty swine."

Another capped this narrative with the story of the loyal Sikh soldiers who had captured some Muslim rebels: "They tied them down with tent-pegs and stripped them naked. Then they began to brand them with red hot coppers, slowly and deeply. The smell of burning flesh filled the air. The sepoys screamed and howled and made such a fiendish noise that we just had to go and blow their brains out to stop the nuisance."

"That is what they should have done to the old scoundrel here, instead of trying him like a civilised human being," said a young lieutenant. "Well," he went on, "I rather like the smell of burning flesh. In our regimental camp in Ambala, we had a mutineer whom our cavalrymen impaled on bayonets and roasted over a slow fire. It was a jolly sight."

"I believe you, Sir," said a seasoned warrior risen from the ranks. "The bastards must be taught a lesson, Sir. The late General Nicholson used to say: 'Flay 'em alive, impale them, burn 'em, — all those who murdered our women and children. It's maddening only to hang them.' That is what the General said. I would take the law into my own 'and, 'e said. May 'is soul rest in peace."

The young lieutenant nodded assent. "Yes, he was a strong one. I have no compassion for these blackguards. Whenever one of them was brought to our camp, I was the first to call out to have him hanged."

In another group, a little distance away, a civilian officer from the Punjab, was telling the story of how he had dealt with an Infantry regiment from Lahore. "Well, these 3,800 infantrymen were disarmed and the European soldiers kept watch over them night and day till one evening a dust-storm threw the whole camp into confusion. The infantrymen rushed out of their tents and began running in all directions. One of them began brandishing his sword and bawling out to his comrades to kill the *ferangis*. Suddenly he

rushed at the Major who had come out of his tent to see what was happening and hacked him down in a mad frenzy. On this the whole regiment took fright and ran from the camp helter-sketler. They tried to cross the river Ravi. I got the news at Amritsar and rushed to the riverside. The villagers had already shot about 150 of the fugitives and were making merry over their victory. The main body of the infantrymen had fled upwards and swum over a piece of wood or floated to an island where they could be seen crouching like a brood of wild fowl. I took a band of Sikhs with muskets and went across in boats. The sun was setting in golden splendour. I had them rounded up and rowed back. They seemed possessed of an insane idea that they were going to be tried by court-martial like the old reprobate here. But they were soon disillusioned. I kept them in the police station for the night and the next morning brought them out in batches of ten and had them shot."

The civilian officer began laughing. He had remembered something very comic. "When we had disposed of 15 batches in this way I was told that the rest were refusing to come out. Refusing, ha, ha, they couldn't refuse, not they. They were dead, dead from fright, exhaustion, fatigue, heat, suffocation."

"That is the way to deal with these bastards, Sir. You did well."

"Mind you," the civilian resumed, "they appreciated my work. The Lieutenant-Governor wrote me a personal letter congratulating me. I remember almost the exact words: "All honour for what you have done. It will be a feather in your cap as long as you live."

In another group, William Russell, the War Correspondent of the *London Times* was discussing the trial with some army officers who listened to him with silent resentment. Russell was one of those energetic, adventurous, intrepid men who abhor a life of quiet, peace and comfort. Not yet forty, he had made a name for himeslf. He had done an excellent job re-

porting the Crimean War and when he received from his employers an offer to go out to India and report on the mutiny, he at once accepted. He was conscious of his responsibility as an impartial reporter of truth and never lacked the courage to speak out his mind. His position as the correspondent of the premier newspaper of England entitled him to respect and consideration. He had travelled to Delhi all the way from Calcutta, seeing a great deal of fighting and had observed, at first hand, the ruthless suppression of the rebellion. He had taken pains to study the legal position of the King of Delhi and he made no secret of his views:

"Frankly," he exclaimed, "what is the point of this trial? Who stands to gain by it? Granted that the King was guilty of permitting very horrible murders to be committed within the walls of the Palace. He had chosen to accept all the dangers and risks to which the head of a revolt against the British Government in India was exposed and he was conquered. But this trial, this indictment! An English lawyer in England in an English court of justice might show that it would be difficult for our Government to draw an indictment against the King for treason, for the levying of war against us as lords paramount or even for being direct accessory to the murder of the poor ladies who fell victims to the brutal ferocity of a Mohammedan mob."

One of his listeners murmured: "Ah, an English court of justice! But this is India, Sir, and the wicked man should have felt grateful to us, instead of . . .well, instead of doing what he did."

"He was no doubt a cruel old man," Russell retorted, "but to talk of gratitude on the part of one who saw that all the dominions of his ancestors had gradually been taken from him by force or otherwise till he was left with an empty title, a more empty exchequer, and a Palace full of penniless princesses and princes of his own blood, is perfectly preposterous. Was he to be grateful to the Company for the condition

in which he found himself? Was he to please them for ever because Polyphemus in the shape of the British Government snatched the poor blind Shah Alam from the hands of the Marathas and then devoured him piecemeal? We crept in as humble barterers, whose existence dependend on the bounty and favour of the lieutenants of the Kings of Delhi, and the generosity which we showed to Shah Alam was but a small acknowledgment of the favours his ancestors had conferred on our race."

In another group, a young Captain with a scarlet complexion and a nervous twitch of his upper lip began describing his method of dealing with the sepoys taken prisoner: "Let me tell you what happened the first time. The man led out was a fine looking young sepoy, with good features and a bold resolute expression. He begged that he might not be bound, but this could not be allowed, and I had his wrists tied tightly, each to the upper part of a wheel of a gun. Then I depressed the muzzle until it pointed to the pit of his stomach just below the sternum. We put no shot in, only three pounds of powder and I kept just one gunner near the gun, standing myself about ten feet to the left rear. The young sepoy looked undauntedly at us during the whole process of pinioning, never flinching for a moment. Then I ordered the port fire to be lighted and gave the word: 'Fire.' There was a considerable recoil from the gun and, a thick cloud of smoke hung over us. As this cleared away we saw two legs lying in front of the gun, but no other sign of what had just before been a human being. And then, perhaps, from six to eight seconds after the explosion, down fell the man's head among us, slightly blackened but otherwise scarcely changed. It must have gone straight up into the air, probably about 200 feet. The bystanders who had been in a state of suspense with their feelings all pent up, uttered a loud gasp saying ah-h-h. Then many of them came across the ditch to inspect the remains of the legs. The second

man writhed and struggled violently doing his utmost to escape from what he deserved. He was tied up with his back to the gun. Exactly the same thing happened again. The legs lay in front of the gun, the head shot up and came down with a loud bang. I went across to tell the Major that I had carried out his orders. As I jumped over the ditch across which his tent lay, I become aware that I was covered from head to foot with minute blackened particles of the men's flesh, some of them sticking to my ears and hair; my white silk coat, pugree, belt etc. were also spotted in this manner."

A middle-aged man with intelligent features and wearing civilian clothes exclaimed as if he were delivering a stage soliloquy: "Nothing is drastic enough for them. They will never learn a lesson. Their ingratitude knows no bounds. After all that Sir John Metcalfe has done for these people, some villagers near Delhi betrayed one of Sir John's servants and delivered him to the mutineers. Well, Sir John was duly avenged. We got together twenty-one of the leading villagers and shot them straightaway. Then we put up a gallows in the middle of the village and hung half a dozen men each day till there was not one left in the whole village." He turned to the young Captain who had described the operation of blowing persons from a cannon. "And look, young man," he said, "you need not have any qualms about what you did. The blacks are used to this kind of thing. Blowing of criminals from a cannon is an old Mughal practice. It is not something we have invented."

A tall pale-faced Eurasian in a lieutenant's uniform, anxious to ingratiate himself with his colleague of pure blood, said:

"How many of the vermin from the Palace are left, Sir? Captain Hodson did a marvellous job with the three princes without losing any time. I hear some more of them have been sent off down below to roast and feel sorry for their crimes."

A middle-aged man in a long white coat gave a supercilious look to the lieutenant, but when he saw that the question had aroused the interest of others who had begun to say: "Ha, how many?" "I am afraid too many of them are still alive," he proclaimed in a voice of authority. "Hundreds, I should say. The ringleaders and all those who took part in the rebellion have been or will presently be dealt with. More than a dozen of them have already been executed. About thirty more are under sentence of death or awaiting their trial. We have the situation completely in hand and everyone will be awarded the punishment he merits."

It was 11 O'clock, and the procession of Commissioners led by two European soldiers in uniform was seen approaching. They made a solemn and magnificent sight, walking in single file, headed by the President, Lt. Col. Dawes and followed by his four colleagues, Major Palmer of Her Majesty's 60th Regiment, Major Redmond of Her Majesty's 61st Regiment, Major Sawyers of Her Majesty's 6th Carabineers and Capt. Rothney of the 4th Sikh Infantry. Behind them walked Major F. J. Harriott, Deputy Judge Advocate-General and Prosecutor for the British Government. The groups of spectators fell silent and opened a way for the cortege. Those who were nearest the *Diwan-i-Khas* made haste to go in and occupy places close to the dais. The procession mounted the steps and the Commissioners took their seats. James Murphy, official interpreter, a weedy little Eurasian, was named, and he came forward to signify his presence. The President ordered the prisoner to be brought into Court. A party of armed soldiers escorted Bahadur Shah, and slowly led him to a seat below the dais. He looked extremely thin and walked with difficulty, leaning upon his stick and taking slow, halting steps. His dark face was emaciated and wrinkled above his white unkempt

beard. In his loose and soiled cloak of plain cotton below which his quilted *achkan* was visible, he presented a pitiable spectacle of a defeated and dying man. As soon as he had taken his seat and plunged his hand in the deep pocket of his *achkan* to search for his rosary, Major Harriott stood up and read the formal order convening and forming the Court as also the names of the President and his four colleagues. The President then put the following question to Bahadur Shah:

"Prisoner, do you object to be tried by the President or any of the officers appointed to sit on this Military Commission?"

Bahadur Shah continued to count his beads, his head bowed so low that his beard was flattened against his chest. James Murphy translated the question into Urdu, repeating it loudly. Bahadur Shah failed to understand that the word prisoner referred to him and that he was being invited to challenge the constitution of the Court. The soldier standing close to him nudged him and pointed to James Murphy who again repeated the question in Urdu. Bahadur Shah looked surprised. Suddenly understanding came to him. He bowed his head once again and shook it slowly twice and relapsed into meditation. Oaths were administered to the President, members, the interpreter and the Deputy Advocate-General, that they would truly do their duty to their Sovereign, Queen Victoria. The Judge Advocate-General read out the four charges upon which Bahadur Shah was arraigned, and James Murphy read out the translation in Urdu. The sound of familiar words slowly drew Bahadur Shah from his passivity, and when he was asked if he pleaded guilty or not, he was able to answer in a faint, listless voice: "Not guilty."

Major Harriott stood up and began addressing the Court:

"Gentlemen, before proceeding further in this case, it may be necessary to mention that evidence will be

submitted to you which may not bear strictly on the charges that have just been perused. Indeed, as the King's life had been guaranteed, this investigation need not have been accompanied by charges at all; but I suggest that it would be better to have the allegations against the prisoner in a specified and tangible shape. It must, however, be clearly understood that the scope of the investigation is not, in any way, confined by the observance of technicalities such as belong to a more formal and to a regular trial.

"The genuineness of every paper will be established in such manner as, under the circumstances of the case, may be found possible, but some, I fear, will have to be presented to you without direct proof of having come from those to whom they are attributed. The court will bear in mind that a full investigation is the great desideratum, and that such cannot be perfected, if evidence credible in itself be rejected merely because some unimportant formula cannot be complied with. For instance, heresay evidence sometimes at third or fourth hand will be tendered and the strict principles of relevance and proof will have to be subordinated to wider and more vital interests."

He paused and looked round at the gathering in the Hall. There was a murmur of approval from the audience. The Military Commissioners nodded assent. Major Harriott picked up the bundle of papers from his table and resumed his address:

"I propose to place before the court a number of documents, some original and some hand-written or printed copies, newspaper cuttings, petitions from various individuals, offering their services in the war against the British, asking for favours, or making complaints against the conduct of the prisoner's sepoys, orders issued by the prisoner and promulgated with the help of a printing press, posters displayed at various places in the town. The oral testimony of a number of witnesses will be called to substantiate the charges upon which the prisoner has been arraigned:

"I shall first call Ghulam Abbas, the prisoner's erstwhile mukhtar and his lawyer in the proceedings. Ghulam Abbas, step forward and take the oath."

Ghulam Abbas looked at the papers shown to him and said they bore the impression of the King's signet ring. The long exhortation to Mirza Mughal had the King's sign manual scribbled in pencil on the margin. With regard to several orders purporting to have been issued in the name of the King, he said:

"I do not know if His Majesty gave these orders. He may have done so."

One by one the English translations of the documents were read out to the court by Major Harriott, and James Murphy read out the originals in Urdu or Persian. Hakim Ahsanullah Khan was called next and as he stepped into the witness box, he looked away from Bahadur Shah and mumbled his oath in a scarcely audible tone:

"You were the prisoner's personal physician and adviser?" asked the prosecutor.

Ahsanullah Khan inclined his head in affirmation.

"Look at this letter. Do you recognise the prisoner's writing on it?"

"Yes, the pencilled words. 'Let this be done' is in the King's hand."

"Is this the mark of the prisoner's cypher written by him?"

"It is similar to the cypher which the King sometimes wrote as mark of his authority."

"And this....and this....and this...." A score of documents were shown to Ahsanullah Khan and proved. The morning dragged on while Major Harriott and James Murphy plodded slowly through the dull monotonous recital of dozens of documents. To Bahadur Shah, sitting huddled on a low stool, large enough to let him cross his legs under him, the proceedings made no sense or purpose beyond the fact that the Hakim whom he had always regarded as a faithful friend and a loyal counsellor and whom he

had defended against the sepoys and against Zeenat Mahal herself was now against him. He was a pawn in the hands of the British, a witness against his King, perjuring himself for a handful of gold. The morning lengthened into noon, the hours dragged on, while the drone of voices continued endlessly. It was well past two O'clock. Soon it would be time to go out for a ride on his horse, Domali. It was a beautiful day for a hunting excursion. There would bc spotted deer in the jungle beyond Najafgarh. But what was he thinking of? Domali was dead. Dead of grief for his master. He had refused food and drink. His heart was broken; he had fallen down, and in one long groan poured out his last breath. There wasn't a thing alive in that jungle. Ah yes, it was the end of everything. If he could go and take a walk in the Hayat Baksh Garden, he would perhaps find a little peace, a little of Allah's grace.

He tried to straighten his legs and get up, but his limbs were stiff and even a slight movement brought on a cramp. A low cry escaped from his lips, and he slumped back on his seat. The President of the Court looked up.

"Are you feeling unwell?" he asked in an anxious tone.

"I am very tired," Bahadur Shah whispered. His lawyer suggested the hearing be adjourned to the next day. The court promptly agreed.

The reading of the documents was resumed the next morning. Major Harriott and James Murphy continued alternately to drone and to echo the wearisome words of complaints, petitions and orders which Bahadur Shah had never issued. What was it all about, he asked himself. He felt oppressed and suffocated. All around him sat his enemies thirsting for his blood. He was alone in the world, alone and helpless and friendless. Everyone had forsaken him. His physician,

his advisors, his mukhtar even Zeenat Mahal. They were all against him. If he could only escape from this turmoil and go away somewhere to find peace. Ah yes, peace from the ingratitude of men and the infirmity of his flesh. He closed his eyes, and felt himself soaring away through the air and then falling, slowly, slowly down to earth. He opened his eyes and saw Ghulam Abbas looking at him. He made a sign to come near him and told him to ask for an adjournment of the hearing.

The court recorded the order: "The prisoner complaining of faintness, the Court adjourned at 20 minutes to 2 p.m. until 11 a.m. the next day."

Saunders, Officiating Commissioner and Agent to Lieutenant-Governor at Delhi, stepped into the witness box and took the oath.

The prosecutor asked: "Can you give the Court any information as to the circumstances under which the Kings of Delhi became subjects and pensioners of the British Government in India?"

Saunders replied: "Shah Alam, Emperor of Delhi, after having his eyes put out and having suffered every indignity at the hands of Ghulam Qadir Rohilla, fell into the hands of Marathas in the year 1788. The Emperor was kept in confinement, more or less rigorous until the year 1803 when General Lake marched with the British troops against Delhi. The Maratha army was attacked and utterly routed. Shah Alam sent a message to General Lake asking for protection. On September 14, the British troops entered Delhi, and from that time the Kings of Delhi have become pensioned subjects of the British Government. The prisoner succeeded to the titular sovereignty of Delhi in 1837. He had no power beyond the precincts of his Palace. He and the Heir-Apparent were exempted from the jurisdiction of the Company's local courts, but they were under the order of the Supreme Government."

"Was any treaty signed or an order recorded to define the King's status as a subject of the British Government?"

"No, but the circumstance has been recognised by everyone concerned."

Major Harriott sat down. The President of the Court looked at Bahadur Shah. "Do you wish to cross-examine the witness?" he asked.

Bahadur Shah shook his head, and leaned back against the *gao-takia* on the divan which had been provided for him. Captain Tytler of the 38th Native Infantry was the next witness to be called. As soon as he had taken the oath, he began telling his story.

"It was 3 p.m. on Sunday the 3rd May. I heard a bugle and the sound of carriage wheels passing the door of my house. This was an unusual occurrence, and I told a servant of mine to run out and see if any one was coming to my house. He went and returned immediately, and said it was a carriage with natives going towards the Lines. My house being a corner one, the carriage was obliged to pass three sides of the grounds. So, before it passed its second side, I directed the same servant to run to the Lines and give my *salaams* to the Subedar Major of the regiment, and say that I wanted to see him, for it occurred to me that he and other native officers of my regiment who had been to Meerut on court-martial duty must be returning in this carriage. The servant returned shortly afterwards and said there were a great number of Natives in the carriage from Meerut, but none belonged to our regiment; by which I distinctly understood that he alluded to my soldiers."

Captain Tytler ended his narrative and shifted his feet. There was a moment's pause while Major Harriott looked expectantly at the witness. It seemed Tytler had nothing more to say. Harriott sighed, and with slow deliberation asked the witness:

"Did any circumstance come to your notice from which you might infer that a disturbance at Delhi had

been expected before it broke out?"

"Yes, oh, yes," Captain Tytler suddenly remembered. "One of my old servants, a man who had been about twenty-six years in our family, was about this time, going on leave, and when I urged him particularly to return, he, on several occasions, with a sorrowful expression, said, 'Yes Sir, provided your hearth is still in existence,' that is, provided I and my family were in a condition to give him the service. He might have used all these expressions about a week or ten days before the outbreak. He left me about this time and I have not seen or heard about him since."

The prosecutor beamed on the witness and turned to the Court with a triumphant expression. "That is all Your Honour" he declared and sat down.

"Do you wish to cross-examine the witness?" called out the President of the Court.

Bahadur Shah shook his head in negation. Serjeant Fleming, lately the Bazar Sergeant at Delhi was now called and examined.

"Did your son, at any time before the outbreak at Delhi, ride or exercise the horses of Prince Jawan Bakht?"

"Yes, Sir. He did this for five or six years."

"How old is your son now?"

"Nineteen."

"Did your son ever complain to you of any language used by the Prince Jawan Bakht?"

"Yes, Sir. That would be near the end of April last year. He came and told me that he had seen Prince Jawan Bakht that morning, who had told him not to come again. The Prince said he didn't like to see the face of an English infidel, and before many days, he would have them all killed and under his feet. Jawan Bakht then spit at him."

"Did your son tell anyone of this incident?"

"Yes, Sir. He told Mr. Fraser in whose office he used to write and Mr. Fraser said as he was a fool and not to listen to such things."

"Was there any other incident of this kind?"

"It was about the second of May, as far as I remember, Sir. The Prime Minister sent for my son to pay his wages. Again Jawan Bakht abused him and said he would have his head off in a few days."

The Prosecutor put his final question: "Where is your son now?"

"He was killed, Sir, in the Palace here, during the rebellion."

Major Harriott sat down with a look of satisfaction on his face. There was no cross-examination by the prisoner, and Harriott called Mrs. Fleming to corroborate the testimony of her husband. He put two questions to her.

"In the end of April last, you were in the house of Zeenat Mahal, the prisoner's wife, and did you, there, see his son, Jawan Bakht?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Will you relate what happened on that occasion?"

"I was sitting down with his sister-in-law, and Jawan Bakht was standing by his servant. My daughter, Mrs. Scully, was also present. I was talking with Jawan Bakht's sister-in-law, when Mrs. Scully, said to me, 'Mother, do you hear what this young rascal is saying. He is telling me that in a short time he will have the infidel English under his feet and after that he will kill the Hindus.' Hearing this, I turned round to Jawan Bakht and asked him, 'What is that you are saying?' He replied that he was only joking. I said, 'if what you threatened were to be the case, your head would be taken off first.' He told me that the Persians were coming to Delhi and when they did so, we, that is myself and daughter, should go to him and he would save us. After this, he left us. I think this must have occurred about the middle of April, 1857."

Captain Martinean gave evidence about the circulation of *chapatties*. He said: "I had frequent conversation with various sepoys on the subject. They said

chapatties of the size and shape of ship biscuits were distributed by the order of the Government through the medium of their servants for the purpose of intimating that they should all be compelled to eat the same food and embrace one faith."

"Did your informants speak of a conspiracy against the Government?"

"No, Sir."

"Did you hear that the prisoner was in any way concerned with the distribution of the *chapatties*?".

"No, I heard no mention of the prisoner".

"Thank you, Captain Martinean."

There was no cross-examination by the defence.

"Your Honour, I shall now call Jatmal, formerly News Editor serving the Lieutenant-Governor at Agra. He may be relied upon as a well-informed individual, fully conversant with the happening in the Palace".

"Did you," said the Prosecutor when Jatmal had taken the oath, "ever hear any particular dream which Hasan Askari interpreted to the King?"

Jatmal promptly replied: "Yes, about the time that the forces came to Herat, I heard Hasan Askari communicating one of his own dreams to the King to the effect that he had seen a hurricane approaching from the west which was followed by a great flood of water devastating the country, that it passed over and that he noticed that the King suffered no inconvenience from it, but was borne up over the flood, seated on his couch. The way in which Hasan Askari interpreted the dream was that the King of Persia with his army, would annihilate the British power in the East, would restore the King to his ancient throne and reinstate him in his Kingdom. At the same time, infidels, meaning the British, would be all slaughtered".

The prosecutor did not choose to ask Jatmal the source of his information, but he called Hasan Askari and questioned him:

Question: Were you at Delhi at the time of the outbreak and if so, what was your occupation?

Answer: Yes, I was at Delhi and my occupation was that of a priest; and on one occasion when the King was sick, and had other priests to pray for him, he eventually sent for me. I went through some prayers and afterwards breathed on him, and the King recovering, used afterwards frequently to send for me, but finding this inconvenient, begged that I might not be called in future, and the King then promised with an oath that he would send for me only when he should be seriously unwell.

Question: It has been given in evidence that you professed to have the power of prophesy, and that you interpreted dreams. What have you to say with reference to these subjects?

Answer: I call God to witness that I never pretended to anything of the kind.

Question: What made you, as you say, breathe upon the King? Did you suppose that your breathing had any curative effect?

Answer: It is written in our Book that when a man prays for another and then breathes on him, it is likely to have a beneficial effect?

Question: Did you ever tell the King that you had dreamed of a hurricane from the west or any other quarter coming upon India, devastating the land with a flood, which would bear up the King and annihilate the English?

Answer: God knows I never had such a dream nor did I ever say so; but people from the Palace used frequently to come to me, telling me that they have been having dreams of the kind. I told them it was all a fallacy, and that I had no faith in dreams myself."

Another witness questioned on the matter was Hakim Ahsanullah.

Question: Did you know a man at Delhi of the name of Muhammed Hasan Askari, a priest by descent?

Answer: Yes, I did, he lived near the Delhi Gate and used to visit the King very frequently.

Question: How long is it that you saw him?

Answer: I saw him last some twenty days before the English troops retook Delhi.

Question: Do you know where he went to or what became of him?

Answer: No, I do not.

Question: At what time were his visits so frequent to the King, and do you know about what time he was first introduced to the King's presence?

Answer: He was introduced about four years ago. A daughter of the King became a disciple of his, and she spoke so highly of his saintliness that the King employed him during his illness to pray for him and send charms to effect his recovery.

Question: Did this man Hasan Askari pretend to possess miraculous powers, or to be able to foretell future events?

Answer: He used to interpret dreams and also foretell coming events and professed to be inspired.

Question: Do you know whether he ever predicted anything relative to the war which was being waged between the English and the King of Persia?

Answer: Not while the war between the British and the Persians was going on; but two years ago he got 400 rupees from the prisoner which were given to a man, who, it was said, was going to Mecca, but it afterwards transpired that he had not gone to Mecca but had proceeded to the King of Persia. The man's name was Sidi Kambar. He was an Abyssinian.

Question: Do you know why it was given out that this man was going to Mecca when his real destination was to the King of Persia?

Answer: I cannot account for the deception. I was told by one of the Court spies, by Jattu or Jat Mall, that Hasan Askari had sent this man to Persia instead of to Mecca.

The Judge Advocate-General once again called the King's lawyer, Ghulam Abbas, and questioned him about the events of May 11.

"Will you relate to the Court what happened on

the 11th May last year?"

"At about eight O'clock in the morning, I heard of the arrival of five or six troopers of the Company's cavalry, and when they were in front of the Gilt Dome over the King's special sitting-room they cried out clamorously. Upon this the King told his immediate attendants to ascertain who was making such a noise. One of them, went to the balcony and had some conversation with the troopers, and then returned with his report to the King. I do not know what report he made; but the King came out into the apartments adjoining the sitting room above mentioned, and called for me. The King then told me that these troopers said they had revolted and come from Meerut, resolved on fighting for their faith and killing the Europeans, and directed me to go immediately to Captain Douglas, tell him of the matter, and request him to make suitable arrangements; the King at that time directed one of the household attendants to close the gate under the sitting room. I went to Captain Douglas as ordered, and explained my message. Captain Douglas immediately accompanied me, saying he would see what the matter was. The King asked Captain Douglas if he knew what was the matter, and how it was that this force had come, and suggested that he should, at once take steps or make any arrangements that might be necessary for the occasion. Ahsanullah Khan and I were both present at that time. Captain Douglas requested that the gate under the King's sitting room might be opend that he might go and speak to the troopers. The King said he would not allow him to do so as they were murderers and might kill him also. Captain Douglas again tried to persuade the King to have the gate opened but the King would not consent, and laid hold of Captain Douglas' hand, saying: 'I won't let you go'. Ahsanullah, at the same time, took hold of Captain Douglas' other hand saying, 'If you want to see and speak to those men, you can do both one and the other, from the balcony'. Upon

this, Captain Douglas came up to the railing between the King's apartments and the *Diwan-i-Khas,* overloowing the spot where the troopers were collected. I accompanied Captain Douglas to the railing, and there perceived about thirty or forty heads; more were coming from the direction of the bridge accompanied by men on foot, apparently grooms with bundles on their heads, Captain Douglas said to the troopers: "Don't come here. These are the private apartments of the ladies of the Palace, your standing opposite them is a disrespect to the King". On this, they gradually, one by one, went off in the direction of the Rajghat Gate and when they had all gone, Captain Douglas again went to the King and said: Have the gates of the Palace as well as those of the city closed immediately lest these men should get in". Captain Douglas assured the King that there was no cause to fear, that it was his duty to attend to his business and that he would go and make arrangements immediately. On this, both the King and Captain Douglas went each to their own apartments, and I and Ahsanullah, the physician, came and sat down in the *Diwan-i-Khas.* After remaining about half an hour, we both went to Ahsanullah's room in the Palace. We had been there about an hour when a servant of Captain Douglas came running with a message requiring attendance of Ahsanullah Khan. We went to Captain Douglas's quarter over the Lahore Gate of the Palace. I reached his room and noticed that Captain Douglas was in the third apartment, and we met Simon Fraser in the intermediate one. Ahsanullah Khan went on to see Captain Douglas and I returned with Mr. Fraser agreeably to his request who directed me to go and ask the King for two guns and some of his Infantry to protect Captain Douglas's house. On my reaching the King's apartments, I sent word to him when he came out of the sitting room, and I explained to him Mr. Fraser's request. The King immediately gave orders to the men in attendance to take two guns

and all the troops that were present with such of the officials that could be found to Captain Douglas' quarter. At this time, Ahsanullah Khan arrived and told the King that Captain Douglas had requested that two palanquins might be sent for the two ladies that were staying with him, and that they might be brought away and concealed in the apartments of the ladies of the Palace. The King told Ahsanullah Khan to make arrangements and he instructed the servants in attendance to take two palanquins with proper complement of bearers, and carry them, not by the direct way, but round by the garden so as to avoid the crowd of mutinous troops who had, by this time, got into the Palace. The King, while these orders were being given, stood inside urging their completion, Ahsanullah Khan standing by him. After a short time, one of the servants who had gone for the *palkees*, returned and reported that they had been sent, and very soon after, the attendants, who had been sent with the *palkees*, returned and said that Mr. Fraser had been killed. This was shortly before ten O'clock. Ahsanullah Khan, on this, sent other men to see if the report were correct, and to get particulars of what was occurring, and to ascertain how and where Captain Douglas was. These men came back very soon after and stated that not only Mr. Fraser but Captain Douglas and the ladies and other Europeans residing with them had all been killed. Hearing this, the King went inside, and Ahsanullah Khan and I came into the *Diwan-i-Khas* in perfect bewilderment as to what should be done. Immediately after this, two companies of Infantry, which were on guard at the Palace gate, followed by the mutinous cavalry that had come from Meerut, marched into the courtyard of the *Diwan-i-Khas*, commenced firing their muskets, carbines and pistols in the air, at the same time making a great clamour. The King, hearing the noise, came out and standing at the door of the *Diwan-i-Khas*, told his immediate attendants to direct the troops to discontinue the noise they were making; to

call the Native Officers forward that they might explain the object of such proceedings. On this, the noise was quelled and the officers of the cavalry came forward, mounted as they were, and explained that they had been required to bite cartridges the use of which deprives both the Hindus and Mohammedans of their religion as the cartridges were greased with beef and pork fat, that they accordingly killed the Europeans at Meerut and had come to claim his protection. The King replied, 'I did not call for you, you have acted very wickedly.' On this, about one or two hundred of the mutinous Infantry from Meerut, having also arrived by this time, ascended the steps and came into the *Diwan-i-Khas*, saying: 'Unless you, the King, join us, we are all dead men, and we must in that case, just do what we can for ourselves.' The King then seated himself on a chair. The soldiery, officers and all, came forward one by one, bowed their heads before him and asked him to place his hand on them. The King did so, and each withdrew saying just what came into his mind. When the crowd became excessive, I retired. The tumult and noise at this time was very great, all speaking loudly together. After a little while, the King went to his own apartments, and the troopers picketing their horses in the courtyard, the mutinous troops took up their quarters and spread their beddings in the *Diwan-i-Khas* and placed guards all about the Palace. After this, I went to Ahsanullah Khan's room and lay down.

"About five O'clock, I heard that the mutineers had seized some Europeans, men, women and children to the number of seven or eight and that they had applied to the King for permission to kill them; but that the King had asked the sepoys to give the prisoners over to him and he would have them kept in safe custody. They immediately made them over on the condition that the guards should be furnished from among themselves. Upon this, the King had them confined in some apartments, and issued orders that their food

should be regularly supplied at his expense. After sunset, I mounted my horse and went home. On coming to the Palace, the next morning, I met Ahsanullah Khan whom I asked if the King had decided on any measure to put down the disturbance. He told me that the King had despatched a letter on the subject by camel express to the Lieutenant-Governor at Agra, and about fifteen days after, I again asked him if any answer had been received. He said that the camel rider had returned without a receipt or reply, but said that he had delivered the letter and was told a reply would be sent afterwards. After the occurrence of the first day, I discontinued my regular attendance at the Palace, coming only occasionally, once in three or four days, and even on those occasions I merely paid my respects to the King and then went away. At the time it was said that the soldiers had risen and Mr. Fraser had been killed in the riot; but subsequently I heard that he had been cut down by a man who was a lapidary by trade and had a shop in the bazar immediately under Captain Douglas' residence. I am unable to say what was the man's name or where he is now."

Hakim Ahsanullah was then recalled and questioned. His narrative of the events of May 11 was a repetition of the story told by Ghulam Abbas with slight variations. Because of the special position which he had occupied as the King's personal physician and counsellor he was interrogated with greater precision and persistence than Ghulam Abbas.

Question: You have said that, on a requisition being made, the King sent palanquins for the two ladies in Captain Douglas' apartments; when he heard that they and Mr. Fraser had been all murdered, did he take any steps to secure or punish the murderers?

Answer: No, there was such confusion that nothing was done.

Question: I put it to you that the King's own special servants murdered Mr. Fraser and different persons in

the palace on that day. Were these servants continued in pay and employment?

Answer: I never heard that any of the King's servants had joined in the murders, but certainly none of them were ever dismissed on this account.

Question: Do you mean to say that it was not generally known by whom the murders were committed?

Answer: No, it was not generally known, nor did I hear who committed the murders.

Question: Was the slightest investigation ever made on this point?

Answer: No, none whatever."

The Hakim's eyes which had been studiously avoiding the King's gaze which he often felt focussed upon him, turned slowly and compulsively towards the prisoner's dock. They caught the look of silent rebuke in the helpless resignation of the old man. The Judge Advocate-General was pummeling him and pressing his points one by one, trying to extract admissions from him, admissions damaging to his master. He had been standing in the witness box for more than three hours; he felt his knees softening and his legs giving way under him; he tightened his hold on the wooden railing to steady himself and continued to make his answers. The inquisitor returned once again to Hasan Askari and asked him: "Cannot you give the Court any information relating to Hasan Askari sending Sidi Kambar to Persia? I suggest that you were trusted in all matters of importance, and such as required writing; and it is believed you know all about the matter now alluded to."

The Hakim shut his eyes and almost sobbed out:

"I solemnly and feeling myself on oath, declare that I have not concealed or misrepresented a single particular. I might have been confided in but still I was a servant; many points of importance were not entrusted to me, for instance, when the King wished to repudiate his wife Taj Mahal, who was by caste a Mohammedan Domni, one of the lowest orders, and to

whom he had been united in regular marriage, I was not at all consulted; nor was I acquainted with the intrigues going on to secure the succession of Jawan Bakht and other equally important matters. I know nothing of what may have been transacted between the Prisoner, Hasan Askari and Sidi Kambar."

Harriott did not pursue the matter further. When he sat down, the Court asked Bahadur Shah if he wished to cross-examine the witness. Bahadur Shah shook his head vigorously, and like a beaten animal whined, "No, no. There is no cross-examination."

Jatmal, newswriter, was recalled. Harriott flicked over the sheets of his file and looked up at the witness. His voice had a stern note as he spoke:

"Can you tell the Court when and how the European women and children were slaughtered in the Palace?"

Jatmal looked round on the hall and fixed his gaze on the hand-rail behind which he stood. "I don't know the exact date," he replied, "but it was some seven or eight days after the outbreak. When I got into the Palace among the crowd, this was about 8 O'clock in the morning. On my reaching the first courtyard of the Palace, I saw the Europeans seated in a row, with their hands tied behind their backs along the edge of the reservoir, and also along the small canal leading to it. There were men, women and children. Shortly after I arrived, one of the Meerut cavalry mutineers fired a pistol at them. He was standing at some distance on horseback. The shot missed the Europeans and hit one of the King's sepoys who was standing some way behind them. This man died in consequence, and owing to this accident, the crowd decided on killing the Europeans with swords. The King's retainers, as well as some of the mutineers, drew their swords to carry out this resolve; but I had not the nerve to stay and witness the execution, so went home, and subsequently heard that they had all been slaughtered by the King's servants and the mutinous

soldiery."

Jatmal was not present when Basant Ali Khan claimed that he had obtained the King's permission to kill the Europeans. All he could say was that "on the morning of the massacre, Basant Ali Khan is stated to have stood in the courtyard of the *Diwan-i-Khas* and to have called out loudly that the King had sanctioned the slaughter of the Europeans, and that the personal armed retainers of the Prisoner were directed to go and assist in carrying it into effect."

The Judge Advocate-General asked the witness:

"In your opinion, could the King, had he been anxious to do so, have saved the Europeans, especially the women and children?"

The witness replied:

"I heard in the city that the King did wish to save the Europeans, particularly the women and children, but that he was overruled by the violence of the soldiery and had not the firmness to oppose them."

Jatmal was one of the few witnesses whom Bahadur Shah cross-examined:

Question: Do you know whether the people who murdered Mr. Fraser were encouraged to do so by me, or were they instigated to the act by the army?

Answer: As far as I know the King had not had time to hear of the murder before it was committed; the rioters were sufficiently disposed to murder, and being encouraged by the army, perpetrated it at once.

Question: Did you hear that I expressed a wish to have the corpses of the murdered Europeans removed and that the soldiery would not allow me?

Answer: No, I have no knowledge on the subject.

Question: Do you know whether I gave the order to my armed retainers to assist in slaying the Europeans, or did Basant Ali Khan falsely give out that I had done so?

Answer: I can't say.

In answer to a Court question the witness said that he did not see any of the King's confidential servants

or officers present at the time of the massacre on the 16th. But Mirza Mughal was standing on the roof of his house overlooking the courtyard, and at the same time, some other sons and grandsons of the King were standing on their houses, "apparently for the purpose of witnessing the massacre."

Another witness whose evidence related to the massacre was Chuni, a news-writer in the pay of the British. He said that on the morning of the fateful day he heard that there was a great disturbance going on in the Palace. He accordingly hurried there to pick up whatever 'copy' was available. When he arrived, he saw the King's personal attendants and some of the mutinous soldiery slaying the Europeans. To add a touch of corroborative detail to his narrative, he said: "At this time, one of the King's servants spoke to me saying, you collect news for the English, if you continue to do so, you shall be served in the same way as these have been. This man's name was Bhika, and he was in the service of Mirza Abdulla, one of the sons of the prisoner." The witness was asked if he could say from where the Europeans were brought to the place of slaughter. "I don't know," he replied, "but I heard they were brought from the King's kitchen." He must have regretted this confession of ignorance, for he was a news-writer and news-writers are supposed to know everything. So, when he was further questioned, he was able to make amends.

Question: What kind or rank of people generally occupied this place assigned to European ladies and children?

Answer: The building was used as an office by the King's Professor of the Mohammedan Law.

Question: Do you mean to say that such buildings as these ladies and children were confined in were used in any way by persons of rank or importance?

Answer: No, they certainly were not.

Question: By whom then were they used?

Answer: They were partially used as sheds for lum-

ber and formerly culprits imprisoned by the King used to be kept there.

Question: Was there any means of guarding the ladies and children there if such had been wished, or is the place open to the entrance of any rabble who might fancy to go in?

Answer: No, it was an open building, without protection or privacy.

Question: Would any native of ordinary respectability not consider it a great indignity to be put there?

Answer: Yes unmistakably, he would consider himself disgraced and dishonoured by being sent there.

Question: Was this the only vacant spot in the Palace in which ladies or children could have been kept in confinement?

Answer: There was no scarcity of building in which they might have had every comfort.

Question: By whose orders were these Europeans murdered?

Answer: It was done by the King's orders. Who else could have given such an order?.

Question: Did you see any of the King's sons present on the occasion looking on at the slaughter?

Answer: There was a great crowd; I did not notice any of them. I observed, however, some people standing on the roof of Mirza Mughal's house, and heard that he himself was looking on through the lattices.

Question: Were the Europeans bound with cords before they were murdered?

Answer: I did not notice.

Question: Were they made to sit down in a row before slaughter commenced?

Answer: I was not able to go up to the spot, and remained in the Trepolia. I could not see the crowd; but after the slaughter had been completed, and the crowd dispersed, when orders came from the King to remove the bodies, and they were being taken on carts, I went and asked the sweepers employed, and learnt from them that 52 people had been killed. The corpses

on the ground then were lying in a circle.

Question: How many corpses of men were among the number?

Answer: Only five or six; the rest were women and children.

Question: Do you know what was subsequently done with these bodies?

Answer: Yes, they were taken in two carts in the direction of Salimgarh in order to be thrown into the river in conformity to the prisoner's orders.

Question: When the massacre had been accomplished, were any guns fired as a token or expression of joy on the occasion?

Answer: I heard no guns myself, nor did I hear from any one else that any had been fired".

Major Harriott produced the court diary prepared by Chuni Lal and had it read out in Court. The version set out in the diary was somewhat different from the newswriter's oral testimony.

"Some persons told the troopers that a number of Europeans were concealed in one of the covered drains of the canal. Hearing this Mirza Abubakr, accompanied by the troopers, went to the place indicated, and jumping into the drain, discharged his pistol in it but no Europeans were discovered. After this the men of the cavalry and infantry drew their swords, and surrounded the physician Ahsanullah Khan, declaring their firm belief that he maintained an understanding with the English. They agreed that it was on that account that he kept the European prisoners, intending that when the English came he might make them over, and would have the soldiers killed. The matter ended in retaking the Europeans, men, women and children, 52 in number, from the jail, where they were confined to the reservoir near the music gallery, with the intent to kill them there. The Prince Mirza Majhli attempted to remonstrate, urging that the slaughter of women was not legal according to the Mohammedan Law. The troopers, on this, re-

solved to kill the said Mirza, but he ran away and so escaped. They then made the prisoners sit down, and one of them fired his carbine at them. The bullet wounded one of the King's armed retainers. After this two of the King's personal armed retainers killed the whole of the Europeans, men, women, and children, with their swords."

There was no mention of the King having given his consent to the slaughter.

Two more witnesses gave evidence relating to the massacre, Gulab, a messenger and Mukund Lal, Bahadur Shah's Secretary and Accountant. Bahadur Shah had manifested so little interest in the proceedings, not bothering to pay attention to the statements of the witnesses and declining to cross-examine even those whose evidence could have been shown to be worthless by a few well-chosen questions that Major Harriott was unperturbed when Gulab and Mukund Lal made statements contradicting each other and other witnesses. It was the twelfth day of the trial and the prosecutor was so firmly set on his course that he regarded nothing as an impediment, and went on undismayed and undeterred by such insignificant matters as contradictory stories and hearsay evidence. Gulab's examination was brief, and Major Harriott made no attempt to reconcile it with the testimony of Jatmal or that of Chuni:

Question: Were you in Delhi at the time the European ladies and children were massacred in the Palace in May last, and if so, did you see them on that occasion?

Answer: Yes I was, and saw them murdered.

Question: When did you first hear that they were to be killed?

Answer: I heard of it two days before the occurrence; it was said the Europeans would be killed in two days, but I do not recollect what day it was. On the day fixed for the slaughter arriving, great crowds of people were flocking to the Palace at about 10 a.m. I entered

with them. On reaching the first courtyard, I saw the prisoners all standing together, surrounded on all sides by the King's special armed retainers, or what you may term his bodyguard, and some of the infantry mutineers. I did not observe any signal orders given; but of a sudden the men just mentioned drew their swords and all simultaneously attacked the prisoners, and continued cutting at them, till they had killed them all. There were at least 100 or 150 men employed in this work of slaughter.

Question: Did any one make any attempt to save them, or did you ever hear that any one had interceded for them with the King?

Answer: No, no one made any attempt whatever to save them, nor did I hear that any one ever interceded with the King on their account.

Question: You have stated that the time for murdering these women was fixed two days previously; was it stated by whose orders they were to be murdered?

Answer: I did not hear whose orders had been issued in the matter; but without orders it could not have happened.

Question: Was it generally understood that the King sanctioned the murder of these women and children?

Answer: This was not known at the time; but people spoke about it, saying "The prisoners are to be killed the day after to-morrow."

Question: Was any authority in Delhi capable of giving an order for their murder beyond that of the King?

Answer: There were only two sources from which the order could have emanated, the King and his son Mirza Mughal. I don't know which of them gave the order."

Mukund Lal when asked by whose orders the European women and children were slain, said: "These people were being collected for three days; on the fourth day the infantry and cavalry soldiers, accompanied by Mirza Mughal, came to the entrance of the

King's private apartments, and requested the King's permission to kill them. The King was, at this time, in his own apartments; Mirza Mughal and Basant Ali Khan went inside while the soldiery remained without; they returned in about 20 minutes, when Basant Ali Khan, publicly and in a loud voice, proclaimed that the King had given his permission for the slaughter of the prisoners, and that they could take them away; accordingly the King's armed retainers in whose custody the prisoners had been, took them from the place of confinement, and, in conjunction with some of the mutinous soldiery, killed them."

Major Harriott was fortunate in tracing Mrs. Aldwell, the wife of a pensioner who, at the time of the disturbance, was residing in Daryaganj, inside the city near Delhi Gate, where the European subordinate officials and businessmen resided. She was one of the white people who narrowly escaped the massacre of May 16. She narrated her story from the witness box:

"One of my syces came and told me that the troops had mutinied and come from Meerut, and had murdered all the Europeans they met with on their way here, and recommended that our carriage should at once be got ready to take us away, as the soldiers had determined on murdering all the Europeans in Delhi also. While I was speaking to the man, our next door neighbour, Mr. Nowlan, confirmed the report that the syce had just brought, and asked if he could speak to Mr. Aldwell. The two consulted together, and as our house was the largest and strongest, it was determined that all the Europeans in the neighbourhood should collect there and defend themselves as long as they could, or till such time as help should arrive. After that Mr. Aldwell and Mr. Nowlan went to the guard at a hospital close by. This guard was composed of native infantry sepoys, and Mr. Nowlan and Mr. Aldwell asked them whether they would assist in defending us, adding that the Europeans would, in return render them all assistance that might

be in their power. 'Go and mind your business, and we will mind ours,' was the reply given by these sepoys. At this time, shortly after 8 O'clock, the Meerut sepoys had not even crossed the bridge, and could not, therefore, have communicated with this guard. After this the Europeans who had, by this time, collected in our house began barricading the doors, and the women and children were sent upstairs. I think we must have numbered, inclusive of men, women and children, upwards of thirty people. We then saw the mutineers crossing the bridge at about 9 O'clock. Shortly after that we heard they had entered the city and were murdering the Europeans wherever they met them. About this time one of the city people, a Mohammedan and a dyer by trade, rushed into our grounds with a drawn sword in his hand, reeking with blood, repeating the *kalima,* and calling out to know where the Europeans were. Mr. Nowlan asked him who and what he was, and on his not replying, shot him dead. This man was the only one who had entered the grounds, but then fifty or sixty of his followers, city people, collected at our gate. About 11 O'clock, a Mrs. Foulon was brought into our house by a Mohammedan; she had been severely wounded in the head by some of the city people, who had entered and plundered her house. Nothing further of consequence happened till about 3 p.m. when the magazine blew up. I then requested Mr. Aldwell to let me and my three children leave the house, as the servants told me that the mutineers had gone for the purpose of bringing guns to bear upon it, and I was anxious to obtain concealment elsewhere. Myself and three children then dressed ourselves as natives, and left the house in two native *doolies,* and were taken to the residence of one of the King's grandsons, by name Mirza Abdulla. His wife and sister received us kindly, for Mr. Aldwell and myself had known the family before. We remained there till 8 that evening, when Mirza Abdulla came and said he would remove us to a house of

greater security, viz., to one belonging to his mother-in-law. He removed us there, keeping some of our property with him, saying it would be dangerous for us to take it in the streets, and that I was to send my *munshi* for it the next morning. I accordingly sent my *munshi* for it the next morning for this property, viz., 200 rupees in money, and some silver plates; but Mirza Abdulla denied having received it, and sent word that if we didn't move from his mother-in-law's house he would send people down to murder us, and accordingly that evening, at about 6 O'clock, he sent his uncle and some of his servants to see if we had left his house, and if not, to murder us there. I did not see the uncle, but I saw the servants, and they had drawn swords in their hands when my munshi's mother upbraided, saying, 'Is this the Mirza's hospitality; if this had been his intention, why did he not refuse to receive us? Why promise shelter and safety merely for the purposes of murder?' She also added, 'If you are determined to kill any one, kill me first; I have eaten the Christian's salt, and cannot now see them murdered.' She also added tauntingly, 'By killing me you will perform a very meritorious action, as I am a Syadni and a Shiah.' This was in allusion to the King's family being Sunnis, and the sect of Sunnis having originally murdered the sons of the prophet or the Syads. The men replied to her that if they were to do so they would be as bad as infidels; but that they were determined on killing all the Christians; and advised all who were not so either to leave the house and let them kill us there, or to turn us out of the house, and they would murder us in the street. It was finally permitted to us to remain till next morning, on condition of our then leaving. During the night, however, my *munshi* brought my tailor to me; and I asked if he knew of any place where he could take and conceal us. He said that he had heard that Nawab Ahmed Ali Khan was sheltering Europeans, and he would take us there. He went to get the Nawab's convey-

ance; but when he returned he said the mutineers had already got information of Europeans being concealed in the Nawab's residence, and had brought guns to bear on it; but that he would take us to his own house. He did so; and while we were there he said that he had heard that several Christians had been taken to the Palace, and that the King had guaranteed their lives there, though he had put them into confinement, and he advised us as the safest place to go there. On Wednesday night, at between 7 and 8, this tailor and one of the cavalry mutineers, by name Kadirdad Khan, escorted us to the Palace. This trooper had formerly received some kindness from the tailor, and on this account, agreed to escort us, saying at the time, he would not prove ungrateful to him; although they had all taken an oath to murder every European. On reaching the La'hore Gate of the Palace, we were made prisoners by some of the King's police stationed there as a guard. These men took us to Mirza Mughal, who ordered us to be confined with the rest of the European prisoners then in confinement. We were accordingly taken there on Wednesday night, the 13th of May. As far as I can guess, I should say, men, women, and children included, there were from 46 to 50 persons imprisoned. We were all confined in one room, very dark, with only one door, and no window or other opening. It was not fit for the residence of any human being, much less for the number of us that were there. We were very much crowded together, and in consequence of the sepoys and every one who took a fancy to do so, coming and frightening the children, we were obliged frequently to close the one door that we had, which then left us without light or air. The sepoys used to come with their muskets loaded and bayonets fixed, and ask us whether we would consent to become Mohammedans, and also slaves, if the King granted us our lives; but the King's special armed retainers from which the guard over us was always furnished, incited the sepoys to be content with nothing

short of our lives, saying we should be cut up in small pieces, and given as food to the kites and crows. On Thursday some of the sepoys came and told the ladies that they intended to kill us all by mining and blowing up the Palace. We were very indifferently fed; but on two occasions the King sent us better food. Nothing further of consequence occurred till Friday afternoon, when one of the King's special servants asked one of the ladies, if the English were ever restored to power, how they would treat them, and she replied, 'Just as you have treated our husbands and children.' The next morning, between 8 and 9 O'clock, viz., on Saturday the 16th of May, the whole party of the Europeans, with myself, three children, and an old native Mohammedan women who had been confined with us for giving food and water to some Christians, were taken out and murdered."

Question: How do you know that these people were all murdered, and how was it that an exception was made in favour of yourself and children?

Answer: Before leaving my tailor's house I had a petition written, addressed to the King, and was taking it myself in the hope of seeing the King, and being able to present it to him in person; but when I was taken prisoner by the guard at the Lahore Gate, the men composing it took the paper from me; in it I had stated that myself and children were from Kashmir and were Mohammedans. On this account we had our food given to us separately, and the King's own servants evidently believed we were Mohammedans, as they ate and drank with us. Since the outbreak on Monday I had learnt and had taught my children the Mohammedan confession of faith, and we were all able to repeat it. It was from believing us Mohammedans that our lives were spared. On the morning of the 16th of May some of the King's special servants, attended by a small number of infantry sepoys, came and called out to our party, that the Christians were to come out of the building, and that the five Moham-

medans were to remain. The women and children began crying, saying they knew they were going to be murdered; but the Mohammedans swore on the Koran, and the Hindus on the Jamuna that such was not the case, that they wanted to give them a better residence, and that the one they were then in would be converted into a magazine. On this they went out; a rope was thrown round to encircle the whole group, the same as prisoners are usually kept together when on the move, and in this manner they were taken out of my sight, and, as I heard, brought under the *pipal* tree by the small reservoir in the courtyard, and there murdered with swords by the King's private servants. None of the sepoys took part in killing them. The privilege, for it was so considered, of murdering them was particularly reserved for the King's own servants, as it was believed by them that the killing of an infidel would ensure them a place in Paradise. I was told of this at the time by the wife of a sweeper, and afterwards when residing in Delhi during the whole time of the rebellion, frequently heard this circumstance confirmed. Two guns were fired immediately after the massacre had been completed, and I was then informed that this was intended as a token of joy. About an hour after the massacre, an old man, who used to be known as the Mufti Sahib, came and said to the King's private servants who were guarding us, that he wanted to see the five prisoners who had been saved. He told us that our lives had been spared, and told the King's servants to conduct us to some place of safety, but on no account to do it during the day, as the sepoys or city people might murder us (I may mention that some of them had suspicion of our being Christians). In the evening we were taken back to my tailor's house, and the following Tuesday we were again made prisoners by the police officer of the quarter where we were hiding. We were brought as prisoners before Mirza Mughal. The police officer informed him that we were Christians in disguise, and he gave orders

that we should be executed; but the sepoys of the 38th prevented this being carried into effect, saying they would take us. We were then taken and confined in Captain Douglas' apartments, where we were kept in confinement till the day after the battle of the Hindan, when we were released by the 38th sepoys."

All the available evidence, oral as well as documentary, was now before the Court. The trial had lasted nearly six weeks. There had been nineteen hearings. Twenty-one witnesses had been examined, some of them several times; over a hundred documents in Urdu and Persian had been produced in Court and each one of them was translated into English. The members of the Court, and the Judge Advocate-General showed signs of fatigue. Even the spectators felt that they had had enough. Bahadur Shah had, for the last few days, remained sitting or reclining on his divan in a state of semi-stupor. His statement in defence had been prepared under his dictation and was ready for being read out. It was yet early in the afternoon when the last witness was discharged, but the Court decided to adjourn the hearing to the following day when the prisoner would be called upon to enter his defence.

Thus on the twentieth day of the trial, the King tendered his defence in Urdu. The Court adjourned for five days to enable the interpreter to translate it into English, and when the hearing was resumed the English version was read out:

The real facts are as follows. I had had no intelligence on the subject previously to the day of the outbreak. At about 8 a.m. the mutinous troopers suddenly arrived and set up a noisy clamour under the Palace windows, saying they had come from Meerut after killing all the English there; and stating, as their reason for having done so, that they had been required to bite with their teeth, cartridges greased with the fat of oxen and swine, in open violation of the religion of both Hindus and Muslims. When I heard

this, I immediately had the gates under the Palace windows closed, and sent intelligence to the Commandant of the Palace Guards. On receiving the message, he came personally, and wishing to go out where the troopers were collected, requested that the gate might be opened. I kept him from his purpose, however, and when I would not allow the gate to be opened, he walked up to the balustrade and said something to the troopers, who then went away. After this the Commandant of the Palace Guards left me, saying he would make arrangements immediately to put down the disturbance. Very shortly after, Mr. Fraser sent a message for two guns, and the Commandant another for two palanquins, saying that two ladies were staying with him, and requesting that I would have them taken to and concealed in my private female apartments. I sent the palanquins immediately, and gave orders at the same time that the guns should also be taken. Very soon after this, I heard that before the palanquins could reach them, Mr. Fraser, the Commandant of the Palace Guards, and the ladies had all been killed. Not long after this the mutinous soldiery rushed into the *Diwan-i-Khas,* crowding into the courtyard, the *Diwan-i-Khas* itself, and the Hall of Devotion, surrounding me completely and placing sentries on all sides. I asked them what their object was, and begged of them to go away. In reply they told me to remain a quiet spectator, saying that they had staked their lives, and would now do all that might be in their power. Fearing that I should be killed, I kept quiet and went to my own private apartments. Near evening, these traitors brought as prisoners some European men and women whom they had found in the magazine, and resolved on killing them. I had recourse to persuasion, and succeeded in getting their lives spared for the time. The mutinous soldiers, however, kept them prisoners in their own custody. Subsequently, on two occasions, they again determined on killing these Europeans, when I again restrained them from their

purpose by entreaty and persuasion, and saved the lives of prisoners. However, on this last occasion, though I again did all in my power to reason with the rebellious soldiery they would not heed me, and carried out their purpose of slaying these poor people. I gave no orders for this slaughter. Mirza Mughal, Mirza Khair Sultan, Mirza Abubakr, and Basant, one of my own personal attendants, who had leagued with the soldiery, may have made use of my name; but I have no knowledge that they did; nor do I know that my own armed retainers, acting independently of my orders, joined in the slaughter. I swear by God, who is my witness, that I did not give orders for the death of Mr. Fraser or of any other European. Mukund Lal and other witnesses in saying that I did, have spoken falsely. That Mirza Mughal and Mirza Khair Sultan may have given orders would not be strange, for they had leagued with the revolted soldiery. After these occurrences, the rebellious troops brought Mirza Mughal, Mirza Khair Sultan, and Abubakr, and said they wished to have them as their officers. In the first instance, I rejected their request; but when the soldiery persisted, and Mirza Mughal in anger went off to his mother's house, from dread of the soldiers I kept quiet in the matter, and then by mutual consent on both sides, Mirza Mughal was appointed to be Commander-in-Chief of the army. As regards the orders under my seal, and under my signature, the real state of the case is, that from the day the soldiery came and killed the European officers, and made me a prisoner, I remained in their power as such. All papers they thought fit, they caused to be prepared, and, bringing them to me, compelled me to affix my seal. Some times they brought the rough drafts of orders, and had fair copies of them made by my Secretary. At other times, they brought the original letters intended for despatch, and left copies of them in the office. Hence several rough drafts in a diversity of hands have been filed in the proceedings. Whenever the soldiers or Mirza Mughal

or Mirza Khair Sultan, or Abubakr, brought a petition, they invariably came accompanied by the officers of the army, and brought the order they desired, written on a separate piece of paper, and compelled me to transcribe it with my own hand on the petition. Matters went on so far in this way that they used to say, so that I might hear them, that those who would not attend to their wishes would be made to repent their conduct, and for fear of them I could say nothing. Moreover, they used to accuse my servants of sending letters to and of keeping in league with the English, more particularly the physician Ahsanullah Khan, Mahboob Ali Khan, and the Queen Zeenat Mahal Begum, whom they said they would kill for doing so. Thus one day, they did actually plunder the physician's house, and made him a prisoner, intending to kill him; but refrained from their purpose only after much entreaty and supplication, keeping him a prisoner, however, still. After this, they placed others of my servants in arrest, for instance Shamshir-ud-Daulah, the father of the Queen Zeenat Mahal Begum. They even declared they would depose me, and make Mirza Mughal King. It is a matter for patient and just consideration then, what power in any way did I possess, or what reason had I to be satisfied with them. The officers of the army went even so far as to require that I should make over the Queen Zeenat Mahal Begum to them that they might keep her a prisoner, saying she maintained friendly relations with the English. Now, if I was in the full exercise of power and authority, should I have permitted the physician Ahsanullah Khan's and Mahboob Ali Khan's imprisonment; and should I have allowed the physician's house to be plundered? The mutinous soldiery had established a court in which all matters were deliberated on, and such measures as, after deliberation, were sanctioned by this council, they adopted; but I never took any part in their conferences. Thus, without my knowledge or orders, they plundered, not only many individuals, but several entire

streets, plundering, robbing, killing and imprisoning all they chose and forcibly extorting whatever sums of money they thought fit from the merchants and other respectable residents of the city, and appropriating such exactions to their own private purposes. All that has been done, was done by that rebellious army. I was in their power, what could I do? As regards the behaviour of that rebellious army, it may be stated that they never saluted me even, nor showed me any other mark of respect. They used to walk into the *Diwan-i-Khas* and the Hall of Devotion with their shoes on. What confidence could I place in troops who had murdered their own masters? In the same way that they murdered them, they made me a prisoner, and tyrannized over me, keeping me on in order to make use of my name as a sanction for their acts. Seeing that these troops killed their own officers, men of high authority and power, how was I, without an army, without treasure, without stores of ammunition, without artillery, to have resisted them, or make arrangements against them? But I never gave them aid in any shape. When the mutinous troopers first arrived, the gateway under the Palace windows being in my power, I had it closed. I despatched a letter the same night by camel express to His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor of Agra, acquainting him with the calamitous occurrences which had happened here. So long as I had power, I did all that I was able. I did not go out in procession of my own free will. I was in the power of soldiery; and they forcibly did what they pleased. The few servants I engaged, I engaged for the protection of my own life, in consequence of my fear of the revolted and rebellious troops. When these troops prepared to abscond, finding an opportunity, I got away secretly under the Palace windows, and went and stayed in Humayun's Mausoleum. From this place I was summoned with a guarantee that my life should be spared, and I at once placed myself under the protection of the Government. The mutinous troops wish-

ed to take me with them, but I would not go. In all the above which I have caused to be written from my own dictation, there is not the smallest falsehood nor deviation from truth. God knows, and is my witness, that I have written only what is strictly true, and the whole of what I can remember."

Major Harriott rose to address the Court. He had sat up till late the previous evening, going over the evidence of the witnesses and the documents produced in the case. The study had depressed him. Why had it not been possible to get better and more convincing evidence of the King's guilt. He had laboured to collect as much material as he could. He had been at pains to examine a great mass of documents and select those which had a close bearing on the charges against the King. He had selected the oral testimony of the most significant witnesses. But he had misgivings. His witnesses could not be said to be independent or truly reliable. Much of the material evidence came from persons biassed in favour of the British, because they had been previously in their pay, and now had hopes of further benefits. Even this evidence lacked consistency and conviction. There were contradictions on matters of important detail. Had he been appearing before the Judges of the Supreme Court at Calcutta he might have found his task very difficult indeed. Had he enough to draw a verdict of guilty from the Commissioners? But, at least, he had conducted the proceedings with fairness and decorum. Russell, a correspondent of *The Times* had paid him a compliment in this respect. And though he had criticised a great many things about the trial he had conceded fairness and competence on the part of Harriott. The compliment was very gratifying. It had been made plain to the world at large that the British law was no respecter of persons nor was it an instrument of oppression and victimisation. The

old reprobate's life had been spared. What more could be done to demonstrate to the world that the British were not given to exacting vicious penalties from their enemies? He now saw the decrepit old man sitting bowed down with the burden of his misdeeds trying to find solace in the slow movement of his rosary through his fingers; and the sight angered him. Why had the King's life been spared? He looked round at the crowd of spectators who had come to hear the verdict of the Court. All of them must feel as he felt. He glanced at the sheaf of papers in his hands and begun speaking in a low confidential tone:

"Gentlemen, — It will be my object, in the present address, to collect the different facts which have been elicited in the course of these proceedings, and to furnish them to you, as far as possible, in the order in which they originally occurred. In immediate connection with the facts elicited are the charges upon which the prisoner has been arraigned; and though his former rank and royalty will doubtless and somewhat of a temporary importance to the verdict which you will this day be called upon to record, yet whether it be one of acquittal or conviction, it must, I imagine, prove light in the balance when weighed against those more monstrous points to which so much attention has been, and for a long time will still be, directed. I, of course, allude to the causes, either remote or immediate which gave rise to a revolt unparalleled in the annals of history, either for the savagery which has been its distinguishing feature, or for the suddenness with which elements, hitherto deemed utterly discordant on the score of religion have united themselves in a common cause against a faith which, as regards the inhabitants of this country, whether Mohammedan or Hindu, was certainly a most unaggressive one."

He could see that he had made a good beginning. The Commissioners were with him and the audience was nodding approbation. Warming to his subject, he became more animated and began to emphasise the

villainy and perfidy of the revolters. Why had they behaved in this manner and by what circumstances was this most atrocious revolt, with its series of massacres, brought about? The greased cartridges certainly had nothing to offend either Hindus or Mohammedans, for the cartridges had from times immemorial been manufactured in the regimental magazines by the natives themselves. But if fat extracted from pigs and cows were in fact used in the cartridges, why should the sepoys have taken offence?

"Let it be remembered," he declared, "that the Mohammedans have no caste, that even the hybrid such as the Mohammedan of Central India has become, half Musalman and half Hindu, does not pretend to a loss of religion, even from touching pork. Who is there amongst us that has not and does not almost daily witness these Mohammedans, in the capacity of table servants, carrying plates and dishes which openly contain the very substance which, in reference to the cartridges, has been made the pretence and the stumbling block of their offence? Even if we were to admit that all the cartridges were thoroughly saturated with pig's and with cow's fat, still what really valid objection on the score of their religion could the Mohammedan sepoys have in using them. The objections of the Mohammedan sepoys on this head are so transparently false, that it can hardly be a matter of wonder that not one man of sense or respectability among them appears ever to have come forward to seek information or satisfy himself as to the truth or falsity of rumours so industriously circulated about these cartridges that were to be the means of depriving them of their faith. That neither Musalman nor Hindu had any honest objection to the use of any of the cartridges at Meerut or Delhi is sufficiently provided by the eagerness with which they sought possession of them, and the alacrity with which they used them, when their aim and object was the murder of their European officers, when united under the banner of the prisoner at your bar,

they for months constantly went forth to fight against the power to which they owed fealty and allegiance. In the petitions of which upwards of 180 are before the Court, when they evidently unburdened their minds to their adopted sovereign, certainly not restrained by any delicacy of language or of feeling from venting their acerbity against their quondam European masters, we can find no trace of the original sin, no grease spot staining these effusions of disloyalty. How instructive is it that among themselves, and when applying to us such language as 'damnable, helldoomed infidels,' they apparently forego the first specific offence, which they would have us believe, has led them to mutiny and rebellion, and the perpetration of crimes at which humanity shudders. When they were with each other, that insurmountable obstacle to their fidelity and allegiance, the greased cartridge is altogether lost sight of; not a whisper is heard of it. What a contrast is this to their speeches when uttered with the prospect of reaching European ears—greased cartridges are then always brought forward; the use of them forms the one continuous nightmare of the sepoy's existence."

Major Harriott saw that he had made an impression. The members of the Commission were beaming upon him with silent applause. The spectators were exchanging glances and nodding to one another. He went on to press the point home. He denied that there had been a single greased cartridge. To adduce further, proof of the hypocrisy and the perfidy of the sepoys, he warned to his subject. He rose on the wings of rhetoric, and encouraged by his obvious success climbed to even greater heights of emotional inconsistency.

"Let the chimeras, the disturbed dreams of fanaticism, of wickedness, or of folly have been what they may, let the instigations to evil have been as industrious as possible, and then allow the sepoys to be worked upon were as credulous as the grossest ignorance could make them, still, if the greased cartridge had

been the only weapon that the tamperers had to work with—but the one envenomed shaft in their quiver—how easy was the remedy. It required no depth of knowledge, no philosopher to inform them that they could at once escape from every possible perplexity by simply applying for their discharge."

Having thus established the premises of a deep and well devised conspiracy for rebelling against their masters and overthrowing the Government he went on to in infer that the conspiracy must have embraced the prisoner either in its very inception or at a subsequent stage. He described the events of the 9th, 10th and 11th of May, the meeting of the mutineers and the prisoner in the *Diwan-i-Khas* as proof positive of complicity, holding him responsible for the murder of Mr. Fraser, Captain Douglas, and the European women. His voice rose to a note of passionate intensity. "His own special servants, in the very precincts of his Palace and almost as it were before his own eyes, rushed to imbrue their hands in the blood of every European they could meet with, and when we remember that two of these were young and delicate women who could have given no offence, whose sex and age might have tamed any hearts less pitiless than those of the human demons who destroyed them, we are able to realise some slight portion of the horribly unnatural influences that appear innate to Mohammedan treachery. How otherwise was it possible that education, the pride of royal ancestry, a life of tranquil ease and comparative refinement should not have exempted this old and grey-bearded man from all connection with deeds which seem too barbarous for the very outcastes of humanity, or even for the untamed but less savage denizens of the jungle."

He paused, and from the papers on the table in front of him, he took up a sheaf and flourished it in the air. The response to his exuberance was intoxicating him and luring him to rashness.

Lest it be said, he resumed, that he was stating

conclusions, drawing inferences, making assumptions which could not be accepted in a court of justice instead of giving proof and establishing facts, he propounded the question: "Is the last King of the imperial house of Timur an accomplice in this villainy?" and when the Commission had pondered this for a long moment, he exclaimed: "Yes, and I have proved it."

He went over the significant facts. The murderers were the King's servants, but he took no steps to secure them or punish them. So these acts of his servants if not instigated by him had actually anticipated his wishes. No servant was dismissed, no enquiry was instituted, and the King continued the murderers in his pay and employment. "After this," he raised his voice and pointed a tremulous finger at the King sitting with bowed head, counting his beads, "Is it necessary to question whether he adopted these deeds as his own or not?"

He referred next to the assault on the magazine and argued that because the magazine was an important object its seizure must have been well planned. It was not a sudden impulse that made him embark on a forlorn cause, the prospect of the distant glimmer of a crown, a mockery of the sceptre that would evade his grasp. "We have all heard," he reasoned, "in this Court of the vision of a hurricane that was to rise from the West with a great flood of water devastating the whole country, but bearing up on its surges this descendant of ancient royalty. Was it reliance on this that expedited the otherwise tardy movements of these Asiatics?"

He paused for a moment to look around before resuming:

"If I have not succeeded in tracing to the King himself a foreknowledge of the leading events that were to take place on Monday, the 11th of May, I trust it has been made obvious that the secret was in the possession of some influential inmates of the Palace. But from that stage there is no further disguise and

no attempt at concealment. Fairly launched into the stream of sedition, he is hurried onwards by the swollen flood, which was not, however, to bear him, as he imagined, to the throne of Hindustan, but to leave him in its ebb a mere helpless wreck upon the sands."

He paused and searched amongst his papers. He found what he wanted and continued:

"I turn my atention to the third charge, that being a subject of the British Government, he declared himself the reigning King and Sovereign of India; assembled armed forces and sent them forth to wage war against the British Government."

This was the charge which had caused him the most anxiety. He knew of the Diwani of Bengal and the fact that the prisoner had enjoyed the rights and prerogatives of a King. But he had examined Saunders, and Saunders had made no reference to the grant. Saunders had not even been cross-examined by the prisoner. He decided to make a frontal attack and bluster his way through.

"That the prisoner was a pensioned subject of the British Government has been already established, and as the British Government neither deprived him nor any member of his family of any sovereignty whatever, but on the contrary relieved them from misery and oppression, bestowed on them largesse and pensions aggregating to many millions of pounds sterling, the duty of their allegiance will, I think, be readily admitted. Yet, as we have already seen, this traitor rushes to seize the first possible opportunity of overthrowing and destroying the government of his benefactors. On the afternoon of the very first day of the outbreak in the *Diwan-i-Khas*, he receives the obeisance of the revolted sepoys and by laying his hands on their heads unites them in a common brotherhood of infamy. It is perhaps difficult to realise such a scene."

There flashed through his mind the stories of revenge and reprisals which he had heard his brother-officers repeat with great gusto and pride — mass hang-

ings, the vicious quartering of native men and women, the roasting alive of suspected mutineers, the blowing from guns of men who had not been tried and proved guilty. He was overcome by a feeling of revulsion and intense hatred against a race which had made his countrymen have recourse to such barbarities and revel in the holocaust. The sight of the old King angered him. His own shame and his hatred of the inhuman crimes committed by his own people burst out of him in a torrent of vituperation against the King.

"Look at him," he exclaimed, "look at him, sitting there in hypocritical piety and telling over his beads and yet, this enfeebled tremulous old man striving with palsied hands to reach a sceptre far too powerful for his puny grasp, and while bent by age and infirmity, inducting a monarch's garb, to give as it were, a benison and a blessing to the cause of the foulest treachery and murder. Dead to every feeling that falls honourably on the heart of man, this shrivelled impersonation of malignity must have formed no inapt centre-piece to the group of ruffians that surrounded him."

Becoming once again calmer and more self-possessed, he went on to read extracts from the depositions of witnesses and documents many of which were merely petitions from citizens asking the King for protection, copies of proclamations, news items in the Urdu papers or directions given by princes and army officers. He even produced two fresh documents and placed them on the record without proof saying that there could be no doubt about their trustworthiness. From this material he argued that the third charge had been abundantly proved. He then turned to the fourth charge. After reading it out he said:

"As far as the murder of these poor victims is concerned, I have nothing to allege; the facts have been detailed before the Court in all their horried minuteness and they are not such as to be easily forgotten. The cold-blooded, hardened villainy that could revel in leading women and young children to the

shambles, and this too, without the miserable apology of an imagined wrong or the mistaken zeal of religious frenzy, is something so inhuman that the mind might well refuse to accept as truth, did not all the force of concurrent ideas, of direct testimony, of circumstantial proof, and elsewhere repeated reactings of the same dreadful tragedies, enforce it upon our convictions".

He proceeded to evoke the horrible plight of the victims by saying that he had visited the place of their confinement and measured it. The building was 40 ft. long, 12 ft. broad and about 10 ft. high. It was old, dirty and dilapidated, and without the vestige of plaster but worse still, it was dark, had no made flooring, no window and was entirely without the means of ventilation. He read out Mrs. Aldwell's statement slowly and deliberately, and then recapitulated the evidence relevant to the King's part in the affair. According to Gulab, *chaprassi*, only the King or Mirza Mughal could have ordered the massacre. Chuni Lal had stated: 'It was done by the King's order, who else could have given such an order?' Mirza Mughal stood at the top of his house and was a spectator to the massacre. The witness, Mukund Lal, had heard Basant Ali Khan say that the King had given his permission and finally there was the entry in the Court diary. This evidence, announced Major Harriott with a triumphant gesture, was clear proof of the prisoner's guilt.

He finished dealing with the charges. He could have sat down, and called upon the Court to pronounce its verdict. But there was something else he wanted to say, something that was surging up from the fulness of his heart. His five years in India had not been happy. From the start he had hated the country, its climate, its people and their sulky hostility. The Indians, especially the Hindus were an altogether inferior race. He was returning home in a few months and he must publicly utter the warning he had often voiced in private conversation with his countrymen. It was his personal analysis of the revolt and the horrible events which followed in

its wake.

"Many of the Indian sepoys," he said, "may have been in their own fashion good and well meaning servants of the Crown. I say in their own fashion because it appears to me that they are always deficient in natural firmness and have no idea of strong moral rectitude; their fidelity as long as it exists is more of a habit than a principle, upheld by supersitition, but wanting the sustaining power of true religion. Among such a body as this there seems always to be some discontented intriguers, and who that knows anything of Asiatic character, will not readily admit, especially with reference to Hindus, that the few are more competent for evil than the many for good? Let but three or four leaders come forth in all the open audacity of crime or mix themselves up in the secret intrigues of a sedition, and the rest, if not immediately panic-struck, never think it their duty to check or oppose them. They may excuse themselves for a time by holding aloof from what they do not approve, but active interference even in the prevention of murder seems to form no part of their creed, either religious or political. The most serious crimes are thus passively encouraged and the crimes of the few lead to the ruin of many. Pampered in their pride and besotted in their ignorance, they have, as a body, become too self-sufficient for military subordination and unhesitating obedience."

He next launched on a long and rambling discourse on Muslim fanaticism and their hostility towards the English. He dwelt at great length on Hasan Askari's dream, the circulation of the *chappatis*, the discontent which found expression in newspaper reports, rumours of intervention by the Shah of Persia and a whole host of subjects which had never been mentioned in the course of the trial. It seemed he would never stop and the members of the Court were beginning fidget and show signs of impatience. It was 2 O'clock when he began slowly to state his conclusions, that the revolt had been planned and carried on by Mohammedans, and

Hindus were nowhere either reflected or represented. He thanked the Court for giving him a patient hearing. He lauded Murphy's labours as translator and sat down.

The Commissioners rose to confer together for a few mements, and returning to their seats, pronounced the verdict:

> *The Court on the evidence before them, are of the opinion, that the prisoner Muhammed Bahadur Shah, ex-King of Delhi, is guilty of all and every part of the charges preferred against him.*

BOOK FIVE

EXILE

When you have laid me in my grave, go say to hers
O, Angelface,
The one who loved thee frenziedly is now the dust
beneath thy feet.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

HIS THIN bony legs crossed under him, Bahadur Shah sat on the bare floor of the dark room which had been his home now for more than a year. A soiled pan-strained tunic of what was once fine muslin lay loosely over his decrepit frame arched over a brass spittoon. On his head he wore a small cambric skull cap. His slender legs were enclosed in narrow white pyjamas that lay creased and crumpled over his calves and ankles. Suddenly he began to cough and retch, his feeble body shaken while he strove to steady himself by pressing against the ground with his thin delicately-shaped hands. The coughing and retching rose to a violent climax and then began to subside. Slowly, from his toothless gums and flaccid tongue, a filmy string of saliva slid forward and after hanging from a sagging nether lip for a long moment, detached itself and splashed into a pool of slime at the bottom of the basin. The old ex-King leaned back against a course mat which hung behind him, dividing the room into two portions. With his dim and dreamy eyes, he contemplated the blotches of greenish grey stains which had settled on the surface of the spittoon. As soon as he had recovered his breath, he began to hum a low note with a recurring tremor which made it sound like the moan of a tortured body in the last stages of its suffering. From behind the mat, a woman's voice, harsh and strident with irritation, was heard: "Hai Allah, when will this calamity pass? Oof, I am no longer able to bear it." The moan continued ceaselessly, endlessly, while Bahadur Shah's gaunt, wrinkled face,

with its sunken cheeks and a long wavy intermingling moustache and beard of white swayed back and forth in a slow rhythmic movement. He paused and again began coughing and retching, his helpless body seized and convulsed by a paroxysm that seemed to be dragging out his entrails inch by inch. Once again the convulsions rose to a climax and slowly subsided. Exhausted by the struggle, he stretched out his legs and slumped on to a large cushion by his side.

On the wall opposite, he had written two couplets from a *ghazal* he had composed the previous day:

This sudden change of wind has quite bereft me of my peace of mind;
What boots it to relate my woes, my wretched heart with grief is riv'n.
Ruin has seized the Indian people, no words can voice their pain or grief,
Whoever caught the tyrant's eye, was reckoned worthy of the noose.

He began reciting the verses and singing them in a slow mournful measure. The half-burnt stick which he had pulled out of the fire to write the lines of his latest composition, lay on the ground where he had dropped it. He continued his plaintive chant:

Our Delhi was a garden city, with peace pervading everywhere,
Its very name has been erased, naught save a crumbling ruin remains,
Whom they daily weighed in flowers, what knows he of the thorns of grief.
They placed a halter round his neck, and said here take your chaplet, knave,
My wasting body plagues my soul, I have no fear or dread of death,
Would I could end my grief by dying, for life's a load beyond endure.

The recitation soothed him. He began breathing evenly, and his fit of coughing and retching passed. When he came to the end of the *ghazal* he began chant-

ing it again from the beginning. Footsteps were heard from the narrow corridor which gave access to his room, and a moment later, he saw a party of Englishmen standing inside the doorway. He recognized Saunders, the Commissioner, who had entered first, and returned his greeting with a listless raise of his hand to his brow. He continued his recitation in a softer voice, as if he were repeating a sacred text which must on no account be interrupted. When he had repeated the last verse, he rose to a sitting position and addressed his visitors in a feeble voice:

"I have been sick, Commissioner Bahadur, very sick. My stomach and liver are past all remedy, phlegm congests my throat and suffocates me." And as if to give immediate proof of his statement, he coughed and retched and spart into the spittoon. He continued: "Yesterday, I filled two basins. Today, I have eaten nothing since the morning and already the *chobdar* has emptied the spittoon twice."

"I shall send the Assistant Civil Surgeon to see Your Majesty."

Bahadur Shah nodded and went on nodding. He felt it necessary to express agreement repeatedly and unequivocally. "Yes, yes, the doctor, not the Hakim." He took a deep sigh and slowly repeated a quatrain he had composed a few days previously:

To stand and hear the tale of Zafar's woes
Not everyone possesses the fortitude,
Accursed Ahsanullah with the soul of a Jew
Perjured himself for a fistful of gold.

The Commissioner's companions looked at the pitiful sight of the diminutive, attenuated old man, the decrepit frame, the sunken cheeks, the dim wandering eyes, the loose-lipped, nerveless, quivering and gaping mouth, the broad forehead sharply beetling over the brows and receding at once into a flat ill-shaped skull, the scanty and foul garments which covered him. This wretched, hapless creature, thought the visitors, was the descendent of the great predatory Timur who

had beaten and terrified India into abject submission; he was the battered and crumpled remnant of a dynasty of monarchs that had blazoned its glory and splendour for two centuries and in whose courts Europeans potentates had considered it an honour to find a standing place.

The army officer who was with the visiting party asked Bahadur Shah why he had not saved the lives of the white women and children. The old King shook his head and mumbled: "I know nothing of it. I had nothing to say to it."

A female attendant carrying a young infant emerged from behind the mat curtain, and presented the child to the visitors. They were told it was the King's grandchild born a few months ago. The infant's father, Prince Jawan Bakht, lay stretched on a *charpoy* in a corner of the courtyard nearby. He got up and approached the visitors. They saw a young lad of slight figure and small stature, dressed in fine white muslin, with a grey, yellow and blue silk sash round his waist. His forehead was tonsured in the middle, in the Muslim fashion, his face, oval and well-shaped, was disfigured by a coarse mouth though his eyes were quick and bright, if not very pleasant in expression. Four white tunicked and turbaned attendants who had been standing near his charpoy, had followed him and stood behind him respectfully with folded hands, watching every movement of the Prince with obsequious anxiety. The Prince *salaamed* the visitors respectfully and stood looking at them expectantly. One of the attendants said: "*Hazur*, Shahzada Bahadur is sick." The Commissioner gave a direction that the Prince should go back to his bed and lie down. Jawan Bakht again *salaamed*, and walking to his charpoy, stretched himself on his back with a loud sigh. He turned his head towards the visitors and pulled up a soiled crumpled sheet to cover his face.

A heavy-looking thick-set boy of 13 or 14 came from behind the curtain and stood near Jawan Bakht's

charpoy. The Commissioner informed his companions that this was the latest born of the head of the House of Timur.

"Not a sweet young Prince as you see. As a matter of fact, I am extremely doubtful if his claim to be of blood royal is genuine. His mother—well, she was quite notorious,—a woman of low caste, presented the monarch with this pledge rather late in his life. However, we need not probe into the affair. It would serve no useful purpose, and, ah, well, I am bound to say that at all events, he has his father's acquiline nose and his lips are like those of his half-brother, Jawan Bakht."

The visitors laughed. The Commissioner's remarks had not been translated into Urdu and Bahadur Shah gave a puzzled look to his visitors and groaned. A woman's voice from behind the curtain called out: "Commissioner Bahadur," Zeenat Mahal was desirous of speaking to the distinguished visitors. Standing out of sight behind the mat, she began telling the visitors the story of her suffering. "He sits there," she suddenly burst out, "shouting and ordering the servants. The old fool goes on as if he were a King still. He is no King now. Then, he lies down and groans as if the devil himself were tearing his limbs apart. All of a sudden he starts singing and chanting verses, stopping every few minutes to tell me that I have brought all this trouble upon him. He is a troublesome, nasty, cross old fellow and I am quite tired of him. I want to go away from him. If it were not for him, I would have got back the treasure and jewels which Hodson Sahib had pledged his word to return to me. He gave me a document to this effect. And then, after Hodson Sahib's death, I was asked to give up my document, and my valuables worth twenty lakhs of rupees have not been returned to me. I don't know what further calamities Fate has in store for me if I remain tied to this wicked old fool."

The long harangue was delivered in a shrill high-

pitched voice, hurtling and tumbling over words at the speed of an angry mountain torrent. She came to a climax, and then suddenly broke down and dissolved into loud sobs. One of her maid-servants led her away and made her lie down on her *charpoy*. The Commissioner who had heard the long, angry wail and understood just enough to give him an indication of the wrongs she complained of, had remained silent. He now turned to Bahadur Shah and tried to assume a look of deep concern. But the ex-King showed no sign of having been the least bit put out. He called out to his attendant to bring him a piece of coffee cake or chocolate, and when a grubby salver was extended towards him, he picked up a small piece of cake, put it in his mouth, mumbled it and smiled. He looked up at the Commissioner and pointed with his thumb over his shoulder in the direction from which his favourite Queen's shrill and angry words were hurled at him. A philosophic calm spread over his face, he seemed to forget his own pain and sickness and with something approaching tolerant good humour, he shook his head and said: "My Allah, listen to her, just listen to her." He shook his head and began reciting:

Dear bird of my heart, weep not, to shed tears in this place is forbidden;
To those who are confined in this cage their water and grain are forbidden.
On slaughtering me, the stone-hearted executioner uttered the admonition—
Be slaughtered and die in silence for to flutter and cry is forbidden.

For Saunders, the entire business of Bahadur Shah's arrest, trial and imprisonment, was an extremely disagreeable memory. He had never been in favour of giving a guarantee of life to the rebel King. It would have saved a great deal of bother, the long, painful trial and the still longer incarceration of the entire family, if Bahadur Shah had been put to the sword.

His association with the ex-King was a source of annoyance to him and his periodic visits to him irritated him. But, this morning, he had come to perform the last unpleasant task; and though he looked forward to a feeling of relief when it would all be over, he feared his mission was, by no means, an easy one. After seeing the disintegration of the ex-King and ex-Queen's character, however, he felt that what he had to say would come as a relief to them also. Their long stay in the prison had given them a sense of having been abandoned and of having become derelicts. Whatever virtues they possessed had been sapped and destroyed. Bahadur Shah had fallen into a state of such utter despondency that escape from it seemed impossible, and Zeenat Mahal's temper, under the prolonged whipping and bludgeoning of misfortune, had lost its balance and wholeness. On his previous visit which had taken place several months ago, he had found her still playing the role of a considerate, almost anxious spouse, trying to minister to the old man and offering him whatever comfort their situation made possible. She had, she seemed to say, cast her lot with him. She had no regrets and it was the will of Allah that it should be thus. But, months of solitude and frustration in the dark, low and dirty rooms of their prison house, the frequent indisposition of her aged husband and above all, her own unfulfilled yearnings, had brought her a bitterness of spirit which spilled out of her and affected everyone around her. Her son, Jawan Bakht, had become a source of pain and annoyance. What she now desired, above all, was a release from her anguish, a change, anything, anything at all that would take her away from the miserable life of the four small rooms in which the royal family had been confined.

The Commissioner addressed Bahadur Shah in a formal, almost solemn tone:

"Siraj-ud-Din, the Supreme Government has made its decision about your future. Orders have been received by me that you and your immediate family are

to be moved to Rangoon where you will stay. To this end, preparations are to be made at once, and we hope that you will be able to leave within a few days."

Bahadur Shah received the information in silence. He had taken his rosary out of the pocket of his tunic, and had busied himself with slowly telling over his beads. He made no response to the Commissioner's announcement. Zeenat Mahal's reaction was a loud cry. She called upon Allah to send help, telling Him that she was being exiled and sent beyond the black water.

"What have I done to deserve this? I won't go. I won't go. I shall kill myself. Will someone give me a diamond to swallow? Oh, give me poison that I may find release from this wretched existence. *Hai*, Allah, have You, too abandoned me?"

The Commissioner and his companions slowly moved away, and traversing the dingy, dark passage, made their way out of the prisoners' apartments. Outside, the freshness of an October sun and a cool breeze from across the Jamuna deepened a sense of guilt which he had begun to experience during the half hour he had spent with the descendant of him who had, on the 12th of August, 1765, conferred on the East India Company, the Diwani of the Provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, and many other possessions under inferior grants from the subedars of Bengal, Deccan and Carnatic.

Zeenat Mahal shut her eyes and tried to compose herself to sleep. She had been kept awake during the early part of the night by Zamani Begum. The poor girl was feeling the strain of the journey, and her condition was making her increasingly nervous. The unusual time-schedule of rest, sleep and travel, had upset the daily rhythm of her life, and Zeenat Mahal had had to get up from her bed frequently to go to her. Not that she was able to do anything for her daughter-

in-law, but her very presence and her solicitousness were a source of comfort to the young mother-to-be. She lay now in her litter, fast asleep, rocked by the gentle movement of the carriage. She was probably dreaming of the days when she had roamed about the Palace followed by a dozen maid-servants, or lain on the silk draperies of her couch while her slave girls stood by to run errands for her, massage her scalp, press and knead her tired limbs or serve children *sherbet* in a silver bowl. The young could adjust themselves after a preliminary revolt and protest, but Zeenat Mahal could not coax sleep to come to her tired body. The gentle swaying of her litter, the muffled impact of horses' hoofs on the dirt-road, and the occasional exhortation of a driver, only accentuated the disquiet of her mind.

Three days ago, the royal household had been woken up, an hour after midnight and informed that everything was ready for their departure from Delhi on the long journey to Rangoon. Saunders, the Commissioner, had himself come to call Bahadur Shah. In the dim light of the oil lantern, he looked tired and impatient. He had been up all night supervising the arrangements for the safe conduct of the party and their halts *en route.* As the prisoners marched out of their apartments, they felt the cold night air on their faces. A black sullen sky hung overhead, and as they waited for what seemed an interminable period, they were overcome by a heavy, paralysing sense of depression. No one spoke, but each of them felt the collective gloom of already having become aliens in their ancestral dwelling and being something apart from and totally foreign to the red walls which had protected, nourished and glorified them for many years. At last, they had started. Bahadur Shah was carried in a palanquin carriage along with his sons, Jawan Bakht and Shah Abbas; Zeenat Mahal and her daughter-in-law, Shah Zamani Begum, were assigned another palanquin carriage; and the remaining three members of the royal

family, Rukia Begum, sister of Shah Zamani Begum and Mumtaz Dulhan Begum, their mother, and Taj Mahal Begum who had made her peace with Bahadur Shah and swore eternal loyalty and love for her King and husband, were accommodated in the third palanquin carriage. The remaining members of the party consisting of four concubines, eleven female attendants and five male servants, crowded into the tilted bullock-carts which stood ready to receive them. Lieutenant Ommanney was to conduct the prisoners, and his equipage consisted of eight *chaprassis,* thirty coolies and a train of pack-animals including twenty camels, to carry the tents and provisions for the long journey to Allahabad. The convoy was guarded by an escort of the 9th Lancers.

The party started from the Red Fort by the unobtrusive riverside path which Bahadur Shah had taken a year and six weeks previously on the night he had tried to escape from the tightening cordon of British advance. Recalling that occasion, Bhadur Shah thought with a horrible, sinking sensation in his entrails that his life now was utterly purposeless. Neither at the time of his defeat in battle and the destruction of his hopes nor when he was leaving his ancestral Palace had he so poignantly realised as he did now that the end had come. Then he was still King, beaten, driven out of his kingdom, routed and forced to flee, but still a King—his subjects still looked up to him. Bakht Khan had implored him to go with him so that the fight for liberation might be continued. The British Officer who came to arrest him and looked at him with eyes full of deep and vicious hate, had addressed him as "Your Majesty." Now, he was no more than a common miscreant, a convict, who was on his way to undergo a term of life imprisonment in exile. His status, his title, his office, his honour and dignity, had been torn off his person strip by strip, till he stood naked in the eyes of everyone, not Abu Zafar Siraj-Ud-Din Mohammed Bahadur Shah Ghazi, Emperor of India, but simply

Abu Zafar, the traitor whose life had been spared by an act of mercy. The British had succeeded in utterly destroying and annihilating the Mughal Empire and the House of Timur, and they had achieved this by staging a public exhibition of mock justice and seeming clemency. This farcical display of justice and their hypocritical compassion, had covered up all the atrocities and brutalities with which they had broken the bodies of his subjects and crushed their spirit. And to think that Allah had seen fit to bring this about! There was undoubtedly a purpose in what Allah did, though often not even His most faithful devotees were granted the vision to discern it. He, Abu Zafar, had always followed the path indicated by Allah and His Prophet, but Allah had found him wanting, he had not been able to forge out of himself a tool which could be of value in Allah's service. He had proved utterly useless to God and to men. He had only himself to blame for his failure, because God was never inspired by malice or wickedness. Self-condemnation gave place to self-pity, and lying on his bed, in the palanquin carriage, he began to shed silent tears. Slowly, haltingly, the pain inside him began to seek relief in words which he whispered to the low roof of his palanquin, words which sometimes spilled out of him as effortlessly as a cup of wine spills over, and somteimes struggled to find utterance from the cauldron of his suppressed passion. The words arranged themselves into phrases, fell into a slow rhythmic measure, going backward and forward, changing step and altering ranks till the first couplet of the finest *ghazal* he had ever composed took shape. He repeated it slowly, murumring it, feeling its size and contours, dwelling with professional pride on its dirge-like measure, and the deep pathos of its long-drawn vowels, the open a's and closed oo's:

No eye lights up on seeing me, no heart feels solace in my presence,
I am that fistful of dust which serves no use or purpose.

Suddenly he began sobbing. His sobs tore apart the words and phrases of the verse as he uttered them and turned his recitation into a bizarre, almost a comic musical performance. But the outburst soothed him, and he gradually fell asleep repeating the two lines into which he had squeezed out all his sense of failure and incompetence, his pride, ambition, greed, sensuality and the true magnitude of the little being that he really was and always had been.

The cavalcade travelled till an hour after dawn, and when it arrived at the pre-arranged camping ground, the coolies who had been instructed to proceed ahead and pitch the tents, had just begun to spread out the canvas tops and fix the pegs in the ground. The carriages and carts were lined up on one side of the camping ground and closely guarded by the escort of British Lancers. Lieutenant Ommanney took care that the prisoners were kept perfectly separate from everybody till the tents were pitched, and he never left them till they were comfortably settled in their respective tents guarded by European sentries. By then the morning was well-advanced. Abu Zafar felt rested and calmer in mind. He had struggled out of his dark mood of the previous night, and he felt and looked not only quietly resigned to his environment and the new mode of life that awaited him, but seemed almost content to be free of the dark, ill-lit rooms in the Palace which by their mere proximity to the halls of splendour and riches, had been a constant reminder of his departed glory and of his present state of misery. It was comfortable in the tent, and while Zeenat Mahal slept, he busied himself with the task of compiling the *ghazal* of which the first couplet had come to him spontaneously, frothed up by the torment of his inner being. He took a sheet of paper, wrote the *matla'a,* the opening couplet, and slowly began adding other verses, one by one:

No eye lights up on seing me, no heart feels solace my presence,
I am that fistful of dust which serves no use or purpose.
Gone are all perfumes and colours, vanished the beauty and fragrance of roses,
Lo, I am the memorial to the Spring on which Autumn has laid his hand of death.
No I am not a song of joy, why should you give ear to me?
I am only the cry of an anguished heart, I am only the moan of a tortured soul.

The *ghazal* completed, Abu Zafar felt a strange peace enveloping him. He stretched himself out on his bed and repeated the couplets in a low whisper. Slowly, effortlessly, he fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

It was the third day of the long 400-mile journey to Allahabad and they had travelled no more than 25 miles. Zeenat Mahal knew this because one of her maid-servants told her that on the previous night they had passed through Ballabgarh and camped a few miles beyond. Since they marched between midnight and dawn, and their cavalcade was closely guarded from all outside attack, she could not even look through the palanquin curtains to see where they were or what sort of country they were traversing. Not that she could have been any the wiser for she had never travelled southward from Delhi. Her travelling ventures had not taken her beyond Karnal, 80 miles to the north and Mehrauli, 10 miles to the South. But this blind nocturnal journey and the day-long confinement in her tent, irked her and made her unhappy. There was nothing she could do, nothing with which she could make the long hours in the tents go faster. The King had his books and his versifying; he read a great deal, and sometimes repeated loudly what he read; he sang his own verses in a low mournful dirge-like tune, he composed new poems. This made him contented, despite the painful experience of proceeding towards his

doom. The previous day he had sounded almost happy when he read out to her his latest *ghazal*. It was no doubt a fine piece of poetry, and listening to it had raised a lump in her throat; but that was of no avail to her. His books and his poetry did not alleviate her suffering nor the suffering of her daughter-in-law, the poor young girl who could not possibly last out the long journey. They had 375 miles more of road trâvel before they reached Allahabad. It would take them five weeks and more. A few more days' journey would bring them to Mirzapur where they were to board a steamer. She had never been on a steamer before. It was said to be like a big house floating on the river, bigger and more commodious and faster than the boats that went up and down the Jamuna. The British came from across the seas in steamers. The steamer would take them to Calcutta and thence to Rangoon. It was going to be a long, long journey, longer than any she had ever undertaken. Sandal, her good-looking and pert slave, not yet 25, who had sworn never to leave her mistress, had told her all this. She had it from the Lieutenant Bahadur's *chaprassi* with whom she started a clandestine attachment. Jawan Bakht had been very angry and had slapped her, but what was the poor girl to do? The Sahib's *chaprassis* looked upon the King's attendants as if they owned them, and by refusing a compulsory favour, Sandal would only have made her hard life even harder. Besides, there were others with whom Jawan Bakht could amuse himself. There was Lutfan, the imparter of joy, a mature but by no means an old woman who was possessed of considerable skill, and Husaini, the daughter of Zamani Begum's foster nurse. She was young, albeit dark-skinned and somewhat plain. Jawan Bakht liked them fair complexioned. Her son's pranks and his waywardness, his dark sulky moods and his sudden outbursts of temper had often made Zeenat Mahal anxious. She feared he might bring trouble upon himself. The Lieutenant Bahadur was a harsh

disciplinarian. She had heard him shouting at his *chaprassis* and coolies when they did not pitch the tents fast enough. Each morning he watched the business of settling camp, paced up and down the site, going from one tent to another, calling out to his men in a loud impatient voice, and only when everyone of his prisoners was settled inside the tent allotted to him or her, did he go into his own tent to eat the morning meal. If he saw any of the prisoners lounging outside the tents or behaving in a suspicious manner, he whip-lashed them with his tongue, and his invectives exploded like a salvo of guns. Jawan Bakht was a foolish lad, indiscreet and given to answering back. He still regarded himself as a prince of the royal blood. The Lieutenant Bahadur might one day lose his temper and....she shuddered at the vague undefined prospect of what might happen to her son. Her thoughts came back to the young girl sleeping by her side. She seemed peaceful and comfortable. But, how long would she remain thus? Her pregnancy was in its critical stage. She was already four months gone. How could she stand a journey of more than two months, days and weeks of jolting, of constant strain, of sustained effort to maintain her self-control? Thinking of her son and his young wife, Zeenat Mahal forgot her own troubles.

There was an uproar outside, and she felt a sudden stoppage of the movement of her carriage. The noise increased; several persons were speaking and shouting at the same time; there were sounds of men and horses running in all directions. Zeenat Mahal was seized by panic. She jabbed Zamani Begum with her finger tips calling to her at the same time; "Wake up, wake up, Zamani." Zamani was already awake and striving to mobilise her senses. "What is the matter, *Ammijan*?" she asked in a frightened voice. "Something terrible has happened," Zeenat Mahal replied. "Allah knows what. It seems to me that we have been waylaid by robbers, or perhaps Bakht Khan has brought his army to carry us away. Pray to Allah it is he come

to save us from being sent across the black water into exile." She threw queenly decorum to the winds and called out through the parting of her curtains: 'Sandal, *ari* Sandal, can't you hear me? Sandal, has a snake sniffed you? Are you dead or alive: Sandal, Husaini, Lutfan, what, is no one there?" Sandal came running and shouting, "I am coming, *Hazur*, coming. Look I have come, Begum."

The uproar had somewhat subsided, and Zeenat Mahal heard the barking of dogs and the quick muffled tatoo of horses galloping away. Sandal stood by the door of the palanquin carriage. She was joined by all the remaining nine female attendants who were talking to each other in a medley of voices. Zeenat Mahal could not make out what they were saying; they were obviously excited but not frightened. "What has happened, Sandal? Why don't you speak; has someone cut off your tongue?"

"Begum, let me get my breath back. I have come running all the way. I saw him with my own eyes, *Hazur*, and all these people saw him too."

"Whom did you see, you wretched girl; why don't you hurry up and tell me."

"A jackal, *Hazur*, a jackal. He was only a small one, no bigger than a big cat; he came out from behind a bush and ran across the road. The Lieutenant Bahadur saw him too, for he shouted. Then all the carts stopped, but before I could get down, he had sent his dogs after the jackal and was himself galloping away with a dozen horsemen following him. I remembered the days when His Majesty, may Allah give him long life, used to go hunting."

Zeenat Mahal uttered a sound which approximated as closely to a grunt as her queenly dignity and decorum permitted, and leaned back against the cushions of her litter. Zamani Begum was laughing: "These British are mad. Are they guarding us or playing game? Suppose we are attacked by robbers while they are away, who will save us?"

Sandal reassured her young mistress: "Don't say this *Hazur*, the British soldiers are guarding us and standing all round us with their arms ready. It won't be long before the Lieutenant Bahadur returns and we start again."

The next day, seated in his tent after a hearty breakfast, Lieutenant Ommanney was preparing his report to the Commissioner. Everything was correct, he wrote, and the ex-King was standing the journey very well. He described the manner in which the cavalcade went on its way, halted and struck camp. He paused and read over what he had written. He thought for a long moment and re-read the last few sentences: "I always get up at 1.30 a.m., begin to place the prisoners in their respective conveyances and have them drawn up ready on the road so that the column may not be delayed. I send you a sort of plan of the encampment and also the line of march."

He played with his pen, dipping it in the inkpot and scraping off a superfluous drop of dark liquid against its edge. At last, he made up his mind, "Why not dammit?" he murmured, and his hand began tracing out words once again in long slanting shapes:

"It is rather hard for me getting up at 1.30 a.m., waking up the prisoners; the march and then settling them again, I never get into my tent till about 9 a.m. when I have breakfast, but I don't care a straw for any amount of work and am very jolly. I am an Honorary Member of the Lancers' Mess; breakfast, dinner and tiffin, good stags at dinner twice a week; a pack of hounds accompany the column on the march, and we have a run whenever we succeed in getting a jackal. There is a *hooka*, and in short, it is as comfortably and perfectly managed as any."

It was the first day of the English calendar month. Each of the prisoners would be paid an extra allowance of two rupees. This, adding up to a total of

thirty-two rupees, was quite a substantial amount for a major celebration. The additional money was intended to meet the cost of toilet necessities, soap, oil, sandalwood powder, antimony, camphor, alum, cardamoms, baked-clay scrubbers, gram flour, henna leaves, etc. These items were for the most part inexpensive. There was no scope for costly perfumes or cosmetics of the type to which Zeenat Mahal and Zamani Begum had been accustomed during the period of their royal glory. The servants and attendants were happy to surrender their share of the toilet allowance. This left quite a tidy sum after the necessary purchases had been made, and the balance, always at the disposal of Zeenat Mahal, was used to buy a quail or two for Abu Zafar's soup, whatever sweetmeats were available in the city for the young princes or the ingredients for a special dish to be prepared, to which Abdul Rahman, the cook, applied all his culinary art, skill and experience. Zeenat Mahal and the younger members of the family looked forward to these occasions. They were faintly reminiscent of a distant and fast receding Elysium. Sometimes, the special Sunday allowance of one rupee per person was added to the monthly windfall and this enabled the celebration to assume the proportions of a veritable orgy.

Zeenat Mahal was sitting in her room making plans for the monthly feast. Abu Zafar was not well; he had been bed-ridden for a whole week. The civil surgeon had come to see him everyday; he had examined him carefully while Zeenat Mahal watched from behind the curtain; but he has prescribed no medicine and had merely shaken his head when asked how the patient was faring. Zeenat Mahal's thoughts jumped from her planning to her husband's indisposition. She felt anxious about him, both on his account and on account of what would happen to her and to her son and his family if, may God not will it so, something happened to Abu Zafar. He had been steadily getting weaker, and his attacks of indisposition, when he pass-

ed into a sort of coma, lying on his bed for days in listless apathy, were becoming more frequent. During these attacks, it was difficult to give him even the minimum nourishment needed to keep the flame of life dimly burning in his old and wasted frame. He was completely indifferent to the outside world. He seemed not to hear what was said to him, and beyond muttering an occasional verse from one of his own *ghazals* or from the compositions of his two *ustads*, Zauq and Ghalib, he scarcely uttered any coherent speech. Captain Davies, officer in charge of the prison, a well-mannered and kindly-disposed person who spoke Urdu fluently had told Zeenat Mahal that the ex-King's throat had been affected and this made it difficult for him to swallow food or to speak. It was hoped that a recovery would be effected, but she must remember that her husband was 86 and his physical and mental capacity to combat disease had been considerably enfeebled, not only by his extreme old age, but by the agonizing experience of the last few years. She must, therefore, entrust her cares to Allah and be prepared to accept His final decision.

Zamani Begum opened the door which separated her room from Zeenat Mahals and stood in the doorway watching her mother-in-law for a moment before she spoke her greeting:

"*Ammijan*, my respects."

Zeenat Mahal looked up, saw that the girl was dressed for going out and had made up her face and combed her hair. She noticed that the bulge under her loosely fitting tunic was becoming more pronounced, and smiled with satisfaction. A second child would be welcome. It would give her something to occupy her mind and would wipe off the painful memory of the still-born son she had delivered shortly after their arrival in Rangoon. She hoped that it would be a son and not another daughter.

"Come, child," she said in an endearing tone, "come, and sit down. Are you going with Captain

Bahadur's wife?"

"Yes, *Ammi*. She sent word to say that she would take me for a drive. I have not been out for a whole week. The last time we went out she said she was going to be busy for the next few days, and last evening, Niazoo brought the message that the Mem Sahib would be coming in the morning in her horse-drawn carriage to take me out for a drive."

"Yes, yes, of course, you must go out. The fresh air will do you good. In this prison-house there is no room even to stretch one's arms. I have asked the Captain Sahib so often to give us more accommodation. But he puts me off each time by saying he has sent the case to Government, as if he himself is not the Government. *Beta*, we have to be content with what we get. Allah is gracious and benevolent. The Captain and his *mem* are good and kind people. We might have been worse off. How are you feeling, child?"

"Allah is merciful; I feel well."

"Yes, yes, Allah is merciful. You must be careful. You don't go over bumpy roads, do you?"

"No, *Ammijan*. We drive very slowly and we go along lonely roads. Sometimes I throw back my *burqa* and let the cool breeze refresh my eyes and play about my hair. And *Ammi*, I have learnt many words of English."

"Really? Our Zamani Begum is very clever. She will soon be talking to her husband in a foreign tongue and we won't understand what both of you say."

'No, *Ammi*, I shall never be able to learn as much as Shahzada Sahib. He can read books, and he speaks in English to the white soldier who comes to teach him. Do you think we shall be able to go to England?"

The sound of horses' hoofs and the crunch of carriage wheels on gravel sent Zamani Begum rushing to the window. She looked back at her mother-in-law and nodded with a happy smile. Zeenat Mahal smiled back and murmured: "Go and have your outing, child.

May you live long."

The door opened and Mrs. Davies, a short plump woman, with a contented face and lazy contours, came into the room. She made an exaggerated salaam to Zeenat Mahal, smiling, broadly, at the same time, as if to tell her that she did not look upon the ex-Queen as something deserving of reverence or special treatment, but since she belonged to a race whose superiority could not be questioned, she was doing her duty by condescending to treat her prisoner as an honoured guest. She asked Zamani Begum in broken Hindustani if she was ready, and told Zeenat Mahal that the Captain Bahadur would be coming shortly to see the ex-King and her. Zamani Begum put on her *burqa,* and holding Mrs. Davies' hand, went down the steps to the gravel path. Niazoo closed the door and a moment later, the sound of carriage wheels was heard receding slowly into the distance.

Zeenat Mahal picked up the woollen scarf she was knitting and began slowly working the needles to bring out the pattern which Mrs. Davies had taught her. It took her mind off the ache that kept gnawing at her inside. During the two and half years that she had been at Rangoon, she had tried to reconcile herself to the new way of life to which she had been condemned; but though she had tried to adjust her requirements to the constrictions and the discipline imposed by prison conditions, she could not resign herself to such paralysing physical and mental inactivity. She had a vigorous mind; Captain Davies had, after his first conversation with her from across a heavy curtain, observed to a friend that she had a masculine turn of mind. She could not, nor did she wish to, put away the past and lock it up in a box which must never be opened again. The past was ever present before her, urging her, needling her to do something to link it up with the future. But what was the future save a purposeless derelict life in a four-roomed wooden house. The British were powerful, clever and vindictive. They wanted completely

to wipe out every sign and every vestige of Mughal rule from the land they had usurped, and erase the very name of the House of Timur from the streets, houses and walls of Delhi. Did anyone even know the condition in which the Mughal Emperor and his family lived in exile? When they had arrived two and half years ago, they were made to live in tents because there was no other place where they could be accommodated. Captain Davies had been very polite and outwardly considerate; he had said that a good comfortable house would soon be built for their residence. He had prepared estimates and plans and promised that the construction work would start as soon as sanction was received from Calcutta. It was more than four months before the teak-wood structure on stilts was built. Captain Davies called it a comfortable house; but it was no more than a small wooden shack with four rooms, each sixteen feet square, two diminutive bath rooms and a place for cooking. Abu Zafar lived in one room, Zeenat Mahal in another, Jawan Bakht and his family occupied the third and the fourth was given to Prince Shah Abbas and his mother, Mubarak-ul-Nissa. The house was surrounded by a 10-feet high *palisade* and severely guarded. The servants lived in a part of the old guards' barracks and were given daily passes which they had to show to the sentry on duty each time they came in or went out. The total cost of providing food for all the prisoners, seventeen in number, six members of the royal family, three royal concubines including Shah Abbas' mother and eight servants, was eleven rupees a day. So, taken together with the extra Sunday allowance and the toilet money, the total burden of maintaining the exiles was no more than Rs. 430/- a month. The British were each month appropriating the King's stipend of one lakh of rupees and several thousand rupees of his revenue from his private property. They had broken faith with her and misappropriated her entire treasure and jewels worth twenty lakhs of rupees in spite of the help she had given them.

Why, if it weren't for her, the King might have gone with Bakht Khan and have still been fighting against the British. Taj Mahal had very wisely left the King and stayed behind at Allahabad. The King had been very angry at her defection after her solemn oaths and promises never to leave his side, but he had soon forgotten her, and Taj Mahal had, no doubt, gone on to Lucknow to try her luck. There was no news of her but Zeenat Mahal's own troubles occupied her mind so fully that she could not find room for sisterly solicitude.

She put down her knitting and leaned back against a cushion. She let her mind wallow in the painful memories of British injustice, perfidy and vindictiveness. She was helpless, but Allah would punish the *kafirs* for their misdeeds and their crimes against the faithful. She hoped and prayed that the day would come soon. She was not yet 45, and despite the prison life and the unwholesome climate of this strange country, she felt healthy and strong. Her hopes would sustain her and she would be granted the boon of seeing her enemies brought low. The King, however, was too old and too weak to live to see the disintegration of the British. His spirit was broken and he had no desire or will to live. Out of the depth of despair and suffering, he had cried out in song and verse and composed a dozen *ghazals*, the quintessence of sorrow distilled from his tortured soul. Ishrat, his servant and concubine whom he had picked out of a singing troupe four years ago and who had chosen to accompany him, used to sing these *ghazals* to put her master to sleep. She would sit on the floor by his bed, and while gently caressing his arm, shoulder and back with slow movements of her hand, she would sing his verses softly in a rich low-pitched voice. And her singing, sad and mournful, brought a sense of peace to the old man. He liked to have her near him. She was still young and attractive and the memory of her richer and deeper caresses when he had first taken her to bed soothed him.

Zeenat Mahal heard her now singing the familiar lines:

My life's lengthy span was a borrowed treasure of four days,
Two were spent in wishing and yearning and two in hopeless waiting.
Go tell my foolish hopes to find another dwelling,
There is no room for them in a heart so sore with wounds.
Ah, how luckless is Zafar, when he was dead and waiting for burial,
He was denied six feet of land in the lane where his beloved dwells.

Ishrat had just recovered from a fortnight's illness. She had had an operation for an abscess on her breast During her absence the King had missed her, and in a sudden upsurge of his remembered passion, had sent her one of his rare Hindi poems. She had read the *ghazal*, kissed the sheet of paper and begun humming the verses. The *ghazal* echoed the mood of sweet depondency in which she frequently wallowed since coming to Rangoon:

What land is this where we have arrived, and where is the home whence we came,
To what other land shall we travel, we keep on wondering in our heart?
Strange is the land and strange our looks, strange the hues and the ways we see,
Who here are the happy ones, and who the ones with hopes denied?
The world's but a lodging for one night, and the greater part's already spent,
Go tell the sleeping ones to wake and gird themselves for the next march.

Sandal bustled into the room in her usual frisky manner and said that Captain Sahib had come and would Her Majesty receive him. Zeenat Mahal looked at her standing in the doorway, pert and restless, her eyes dancing from side to side. "Really," thought

Zeenat Mahal, "has the hussy been encouraging the Captain too? I would have had her whipped in the old days." Suddenly she saw the futility of trying to assert an authority that no longer was hers, and frowned. The frown melted into a smile, and she asked Sandal to draw the curtain. She waited behind it for Captain Davies to come and pay his respects.

"*Adab arz*, Begum Sahiba," Captain Davies said as soon as he crossed the door. He spoke Urdu fluently but with the forced diction and accent of one who had learnt a foreign language for the sake of scholarship rather than for social intercourse. "How is the King today?"

"He is still alive by the grace of God, but you know how weak he has grown. Has the Doctor Sahib spoken to you about his condition? He wouldn't say anything when I asked him yesterday."

"No, all he said was that the patient was weak and there was very little that he could do. His tenure of life is uncertain."

Zeenat Mahal let a long moment of silence hang in the air and absorb the sharpness of the statement. She did not want to take an unseemly jump to the matter which had been uppermost in her mind—the matter she really wanted to speak to Captain Davies about. She waited for him to speak before she made her oft-repeated and importunate enquiry. Captain Davies said: "We hope and pray that the King will recover and live for many years." Zeenat Mahal countered this by saying that the future lay in Allah's hand. Then, raising her voice, she asked if he had received a reply to the communication he had sent to Delhi about the affair she had discussed with him.

"No, Begum Sahiba," he replied, choosing his words carefully and stepping over the awkward thorns and stones with which she always hampered his course. "As I told you, I have explained the whole situation to the Commissioner Bahadur. I did not express my own personal views and have left the decision to Delhi."

"And you still adhere to the view that the Government is right in not restoring to me my lawful property?"

Zeenat Mahal felt one of her belligerent moods coming over her. It was going to be difficult to continue the conversation without more than a touch of acrimony. Captain Davies saw this, and bracing himself, said in a quiet, almost apologetic tone: "Begum Sahiba, the law as I have explained to you is that since your husband was convicted of treason and rebellion, the entire property of his family became escheated to Government."

"But, I had nothing to do with what you call rebellion and treason. I was not an accused person in the case. I was not convicted of any crime. I was living separately from my husband and the treasure and jewels I claim were owned by me personally." Her voice rose to a querulous shrillness. "Twenty lakh rupees worth of my property is being wrongfully kept back."

"Begum Sahiba, I am most distressed, but according to our law, your establishment cannot be considered something distinct from the King's, nor has your residing in a separate *mahal* anything to do with it."

"Do with what, Captain Bahadur?" retorted Zeenat Mahal, "How often have I told you that when the rebel sepoys entered the Red Fort and began rioting and upsetting the King, I wrote a letter to Lieutenant-Governor Colvin Bahadur asking for help and telling him that we could not protect the European women whom we had given shelter in the Palace? Has the Government forgotten this?"

Davies wanted to say that he had read the record of the King's trial, and he knew that Zeenat Mahal had taken a prominent part in planning a campaign of war against his people. She had held high military rank, and had issued orders to the King's officers. But there was no sense in exacerbating the argument. She was a helpless person in exile, and her former state as Queen demanded a measure of politeness and superficial res-

pect. He nodded in a non-committal manner and remained silent. Zeenat Mahal resumed the assault:

"Saunders Bahadur knows that it was I who persuaded the King to surrender to Major Hodson and not go with Bakht Khan. Hodson Sahib gave me his word that my life and the life of the King would be spared. I have already spoken to you about the document he gave me. My property remained safe and undisturbed till Major Hodson's death, and then I was asked to give up the document he had given me. I refused to part with it, but I was in jail and when I was told the property had to be checked I handed it over. I never saw the document again and all my treasure was taken away and confiscated. Captain Sahib, is this the way the English keep faith? Do you call this British justice?"

Davies noticed a slight change in the tone and inflexion of her voice, and feared that if he prolonged the interview he would be involved in a scene and provoke a display of hysterics. He rose, saying that he was indeed sorry that so much pain had been occasioned to her, he would write again to Delhi and give the Commissioner Sahib a full report. In the meantime, he must take leave as business of an urgent nature awaited his attention elsewhere.

He hurried out of the door and quickly descended the steps. The young princes were standing a little distance away talking to Finncane, a former Brigade Serjeant Major, who came daily to teach them English. Finncane saluted smartly while the lads said in a sing-song chorus: "Good morning, Captain Sahib." He answered the greeting and walked away saying to himself that he must make arrangements for another teacher for them. They had made agreeable progress, and were ready to start a more advanced course under the guidance of a superior instructor.

Bahadur Shah lay dying. The end was coming at

last—a slow but merciful and painless end. On the evening of a Sunday towards the end of October, 1862, Ahmed Beg, the ex-King's faithful attendant, called Sandal and told her to inform Zeenat Mahal Begum that the King had an attack of hiccups and had not been able to take his broth. Zeenat Mahal came to the bedside at once, and saw the inert body of her husband lying with the head raised on a high pillow. A faint, periodic hiccup gave a scarcely perceptible tremor to the body, but no sound came from the partly-opened mouth. The dark sunken eyes were open and a dull glaze in their stare frightened her. A frail bony hand emerging from under the white cotton sheet made an ugly splash which appeared to have no connection with the black death's head and the straggling tuft of white hair lying a foot away. Zeenat Mahal took the bowl of broth from Sandal's hand, and with a spoon, poured a few drops between the parted lips. The liquid spilled out of the corners of the mouth and stained the sheet. Death had not come yet, and the occasional tremor induced by hiccups gave evidence of the feeble life which still clung to the waster and decrepit frame of bones. The civil surgeon who had been immediately sent for, came and examined the patient. He shook his head and told Zeenat Mahal to be prepared for the worst. It was now a matter of hours, not days or weeks. It seemed that the throat had had another stroke of paralysis. He could do nothing, for the old King was dying, dying fast, the doctor repeated, and a few minutes later he took his leave.

All through the night Bahadur Shah lay in a stupor. The hiccuping stopped, and a cessation of the periodic movement caused by it gave an appearance of placidity to the hollow cheeks, sunken eyes and the sharp acquiline nose. His face expressed no sense of pain or other feeling. He took no nourishment, and his pulse grew slower and feebler as the hours passed, but by some miracle of innate tenacity, his exhausted body maintained its hold on the biological machine and kept the

wheels moving round. Hours measured out into days, and as each day was succeeded by another, the doctor and those who watched by the bedside, marvelled at Bahadur Shah's hidden strength. At 87, his spirit was carrying on a secret, invisible fight against the violence of successive hammer-blows of paralysis. On only a few drops of broth coaxed between his toothless gums and gurgled down his throat, he managed to subsist for eleven days. Each day, according to the doctor, his condition deteriorated, though his appearance remained unaltered. On the morning of the eleventh day, the doctor said that the end had come, and paralysis in the region of the throat had taken a firm hold and was rapidly spreading. Captain Davies ordered bricks and lime to be collected and got ready so that there should be no delay in committing the ex-King to his last resting place.

But the King's life continued to throb faintly, almost imperceptibly for several more hours. After an all-night vigil by his bedside, the attendants reported at 5 a.m. that the King's breath no longer clouded the mirror held close to his mouth. Zeenat Mahal and the princes were woken up and brought to the bedside. There was no weeping or crying. A few tears escaped from the corners of Zeenat Mahal's eyes and rolled over her rounded cheeks. Jawan Bakht and Shah Abbas sat on the floor with their legs crossed under them, their tongues held in restraint by the compulsion of the occasion. Ishrat placed her hand on the bony shin outlined under the sheet and sat looking at the floor, sighing every few minutes. From outside, the sounds of servants bustling about and calling out in low tones were heard. Captain Davies and the civil surgeon arrived. The women withdrew to another room and the two white men entered. The civil surgeon felt the dead man's pulse and gave a meaningful nod to Captain Davies. Both of them wore a look of relief as they went out a moment later.

The burial took place the same afternoon. A

teakwood coffin which had been ready for several days, received what remained of Abu Zafar Siraj-ud-Din Bahadur Shah Ghazi, the last Mughal and the last monarch of India. Jawan Bakht and Shah Abbas and the King's faithful attendant, Ahmed Beg, accompanied the coffin. No women were allowed to be present. A *mulla* was called to conduct the obsequies. A crowd of Muslims from the bazar heard the news and assembled near the strictly guarded enclosure. Some of them rushed forward to touch the coffin as it was carried out through the gate of the palisade. But, they were rudely thrust back by the policemen on duty. A few bystanders were admitted inside the enclosure on their giving a solemn undertaking to observe decorum and silence. They would later bear witness to the fact that the ex-King's internment was not carried out clandestinely but was sufficiently and becomingly public.

Captain Davies drew up a report describing the important event. "Abu Zafar," he wrote, "expired at 5 O'clock on Friday. All things being in readiness, he was buried at 4 p.m. on the same day, in the rear of the main guard, in a brick grave covered over with turf, level with the ground. A bamboo fence surrounded the grave for some considerable distance. By the time the fence is worn out, the grass will have again covered the spot and no vestige will remain to distinguish where the last of the great Mughals rests."

After my death one came and placed a lighted lamp upon my grave,
Ah, the hem of a passing breath snuffed it ere the evening was gone.
When you have laid me in my grave, go say to her, O Angelface,
He who loved thee frenziedly is now the dust beneath thy feet.
When Zafar is dead and in his grave, where will they say the fateha *prayers?*
All traces of his crumbling grave are trampled down and effaced.

GLOSSARY

Achha	good, well
Adab	respectful greeting
Adab arz	short for adab arz karta hoon. I offer my respectful greeting.
Adalat	court of justice
Akhri Chahar Shamba	the last Thursday
Ammi	mamma, mother
Ammijan	dear mamma
Arzi	petition, application
Ashrafi	gold sovereign
Atta	flour
Badmash	bad character
Badshah, also Padshah	King
Baradari	a pavilion with twelve doors
Bas	enough
Begar	enforced labour
Beta	lit. son, child, term of endearment
Bhai	brother
Bibikhana	women's apartment
Burqa	veil
Chalo	come along
Chaprassi	peon, orderly

Chick	bamboo or reed screen
Chobdar	mace-bearer, attendant
Dali	a present of fruit or vegetables usually made to a superior official.
Darban	hall porter
Darogha	officer in charge of a department
Darshan	view
Dauna	cup made from leaves
Dawakhana	dispensary
Deori	entrance hall—chamber
Din, or Deen	faith, religion.
Diwan-i-Am	hall of public audience
Diwan-i-Khas	hall of special audience
Dohai	cry invoking help
Domni	low caste singing woman
Farashkhana	store room for carpets, floor coverings, etc.
Fateha	the last prayer offered to the departed soul while the body is lowered in the grave
Fatwa	authoritative pronouncement
Firni	sweet made from ground rice and milk
Gao-takia	bolster, a long cylindrical cushion
Ghazal	a form of Persian verse in which the first two lines rhyme, and the rhyme is repeated in the second line of each succeeding couplet
Ghee	clarified butter
Ghusl-i-sehat	ceremonial bath taken on recovering from an illness
Halwa	a sweet dish made from flour or a vegetable and butter and sugar
Hakim	physician
Haramscrai	women's apartment

Haveli	large house
Hazur	lit. presence, an honorific title
Iblees	Satan
Id	religious festival. Id-ul-Zuha commemorates Abraham's sacrifices; Id-ul-Fitr marks the end of the month of Ramzan when devout Mohammedans fast.
Idgah	place where the Id prayer-meeting is held
Inshallah	God willing
Jagirdar	holder of revenue-free land
Jaman	a kind of fruit
Jashan	celebration
Jharna	waterfall
Jheel	lake
Kafir	unbeliever, non-Muslim
Kalghi	panache
Kalima	phrase affirming the Mohammedan faith
Kanat	cloth screen
Kasooli	cushion
Kathak	style of dancing popular in North India
Kauri	cowrie shell, smallest monetary unit
Khansamani	commissariat
Kharita	form of official letter
Khas Khas	aromatic grass
Kheer	sweet dish made of milk and rice, carrots, etc.
Khillat	ceremonial robe conferred on a subordinate as a recognition of loyalty
Kiladari	office of the manager of the fort premises
Kotwal	police officer
Loo	hot wind

Lota	utensil for carrying water
Mahajan	businessman, money-lender
Mahal	palace
Mahout	elephant-driver
Mahfil	gathering
Mahzar	citation by a person in authority, a document bearing the seal of a judge
Maqbara	tomb, mausoleum
Marhaba	well done!
Mashallah	God is great
Matla'a	opening couplet of a ghazal
Minar	tower
Mohur	gold sovereign
Mubarak	congratulations
Mujawir	caretaker of a mausoleum
Mukarar	repeat
Mukhtar	agent, manager
Mulla	religious preceptor
Mushaira	poetic symposium
Naqara	big drum sounded on special or ceremonial occasions
Naqarkhana	place where naqaras are kept
Nazr or nazar	offering of money or clothes etc. to a superior person
Nazir	superintendent
Nazarat	office of superintendent
Padshah, also Badshah	King
Paisa	one sixty-fourth part of a rupee
Pan	betel leaf
Paratha	fried chapatti
Pargana	small revenue or administrative unit

Pashmeena	Cashmere wool
Pilau	dish of rice cooked with meat, spices, etc.
Qalmi	the variety of mangoes which are cut and eaten as distinct from those that are sucked
Qibla	sire
Qilladar	officer in charge of the fort
Rakhi	ceremonial thread tied by a sister on her brother's hand on the occasion of the Salono festival. The thread symbolises brotherly love and protection. It became customary for dependents and aspirants for favours to offer rakhi to their patrons.
Rath	a kind of chariot
Risala	cavalry
Ruka	letter, note
Salateens	princes of royal blood
Salono	a Hindu festival—See Rakhi
Sawaree	procession, cortège
Shahzada	prince
Shamiana	marquee
Shikari	hunter
Shukrana	thanksgiving
Shooqa	letter sent by a ruler to a subordinate individual
Sipahi	soldier
Subhan Allah	by the grace of God
Takhallus	poetic sobriquet
Takhlia	privacy
Tasbeekhana	prayer room (lit. room where rosaries are kept)
Tattie	a screen made of reeds, straw, etc.

Tehkhana — cellar, basement
Thanadar — officer in charge of a police station
Toshakhana — store room for wearing apparel, linen, etc.
Ustad — master, preceptor
Wah-wah — well done, approbatory exclamation
Waliahad — heir apparent